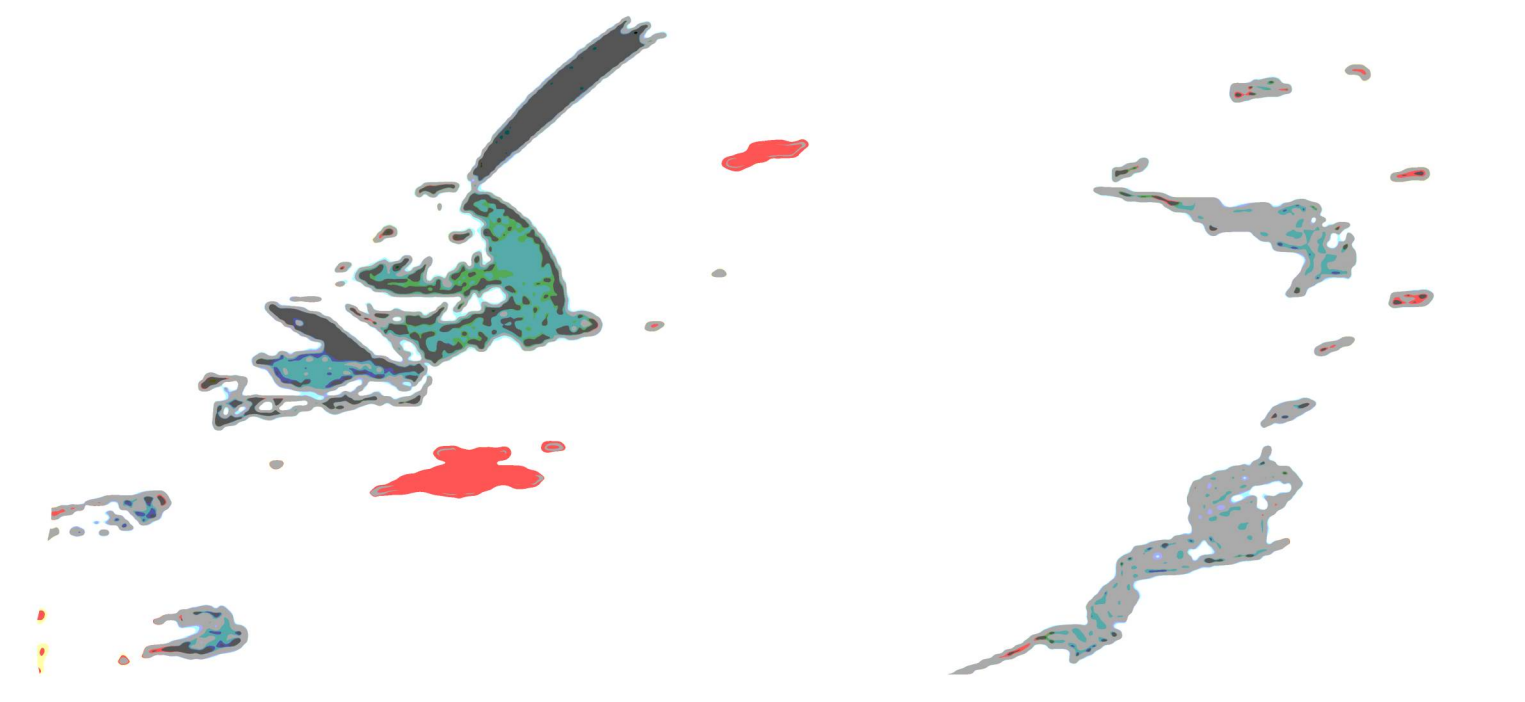


OLGA FORSH

Pioneers of Freedom



Olga Forsh

PIONEERS
OF
FREEDOM

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

M o s c o w



AUTHOR'S PREFACE

I began *Pioneers of Freedom* in 1950, and the book came out in 1953, the year in which I celebrated my eightieth birthday.

The revolt of the Decembrists, that first organized struggle of the Russian revolutionary nobles against the autocracy, was a subject that had interested me for a long time. A study of historical records lent further support to the idea of writing a book about that eventful period of the early nineteenth century. I decided to write a popular book for young people, telling the story of that intrepid little group of noblemen who, although extremely far removed from the people, sacrificed their lives in the interests of that people.

I am sure that these events, so important for a correct understanding of the history of the Russian revolutionary movement, will continue to attract other writers.

A few words about my own life and work.

I was born in the Fortress of Gunib, in the Caucasus, in 1873. My father, General D. V. Komarov, who was then Military Governor in Central Daghestan, had his Headquarters there. My mother, an Armenian, died at my birth, and I grew up in an environment of military men. I studied at the French *pension* in Georgia, then, after my father's death, in Moscow, and subsequently in the Odessa and Kiev drawing schools and in the studio of P. P. Chistyakov, the well-known painter, whose pictures adorn the Tretyakov Gallery and the Russian Museum.

My first short story was published in the magazine *Russkaya Mysl* in 1908. While working as a drawing teacher at the Tsarskoye Selo school, I continued writing, my stories being published in various magazines—*Zaveti*, *Russkaya Mysl*, *Nash Poot*, and *Scythians*.

After the Great October Socialist Revolution I found my place in literature as a writer of historical novels. In this respect I had the advantage of a life spent on the borderline of two centuries, two social systems. I knew the laws and culture of former tsarist Russia, and came to realize the inevitability and grandeur of the new order by a lively, first-hand comparison with the old. The new was born before my eyes.

The truth of the new life helped me to properly evaluate all that was best in the culture of the old society, to rid myself of the prejudices and survivals of bourgeois culture and define my aims and tasks in the handling of the Soviet historical novel. In my writings I strove after historical fidelity with a view to promoting the interests of art, imbued with the revolutionary ideas of our epoch. My knowledge of painting and architecture cultivated an interest in the creative problem of unity between art and life.

My first historical novel *Stone-Clad*, dealing with the tragic fate of the revolutionary Mikhail Beideman, the "mysterious prisoner" buried alive in the casemate of the Alexeyevsky Ravelin, was written in 1924. This was followed by a trilogy about Radishchev, and after the war by *Mikhailovsky Fortress*. The latter is a period novel of the days of Paul's reign, dealing with the gifted young architect Rossi, and the part he took in building the Mikhailovsky Fortress—the home of the emperor-maniac. The idea underlying this book was to show the people's influence on art.

The next book I am planning to write will be my reminiscences of Maxim Gorky, the great friend of all writers. The memory of him is a source of constant inspiration to me in my work.

For Maxim Gorky, tireless work and close contact with readers were an unfailing fount at which he renewed his creative youth. For me, too, the numerous letters of readers and their interest in my work have always been a stimulus to unflagging effort and a source of creative inspiration.

OLGA FORSH

**"... THE CIRCLE OF THESE REVOLUTION-
ARIES WAS A NARROW ONE. THEY WERE
VERY FAR REMOVED FROM THE PEOPLE,
BUT THEIR WORK WAS NOT IN VAIN..."**

V. I. LENIN

PART ONE





CHAPTER ONE



van Dmitrievich Yakushkin was sitting in the study of his country home on the Zhukovo estate, near Vyazma.

Yakushkin was quite a young man yet. He had but recently retired, and his civilian clothes sat upon him rather awkwardly: the high white collar propped up his shaven cheeks and his neckerchief was tied none too skilfully. Set off by large grey eyes, his handsome face looked swarthier than it was.

Birches, tinged with the yellow of autumn, peeped through the open windows of the study, and between their white trunks a clear blue pond could be descried in the distance.

A packet from Major-General Fonvizin, just delivered by a travelling acquaintance from Moscow, lay on the desk.

Yakushkin reached for it, but glancing at the clock, changed his mind, and covered the letter with a cast-iron ash-tray in the shape of a bast sandal. "The children will

be coming for their lesson soon," he thought. "This is no trivial letter, and I had better read it at my leisure."

The senior pupil of Yakushkin's private school appeared in the open doorway.

"Ivan Dmitrievich," the boy said cheerfully without a hint of shyness, "Lyonka's father wants to see you. He wants to make you pay smart money for his boy. We told him it was a shame, but it's no use. 'If the gentleman wants his bit o' fun,' he says, 'he'll have to pay for it.'"

"The idea!" Yakushkin said with a wry smile. "All right, Senya, get the boys seated and hand out the slates and exercise-books. I shan't be a minute."

Yakushkin went into the kitchen. There a skinny undersized peasant threw himself at his feet, wailing: "For pity's sake, sir, let me have a cart of firewood for Lyonka!"

"Don't you dare to fall at my feet," Yakushkin said angrily. "You know I have forbidden these vile habits. And how dare you doff your cap to me when I'm wearing my own hat. Do you hear?"

"We've heard aplenty," the man drawled with sudden apathy, and then repeated his request: "Just a cartload for Lyonka, sir! For you it's a gentleman's sport, but for me it's a loss."

"Lyonka is provided with clothes, boots and food," Yakushkin said, controlling his temper, "it's in your own interest to keep him at school. When he finishes school we shall send him to Moscow to learn a trade."

"There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," the peasant said with a grin, but caught himself and added hastily: "As for your feeding him, sir, I'm much obliged. . . ."

The man was about to throw himself at his feet again, but Yakushkin pulled him up before he could do so, and his steward happening to come in at the moment, he

ordered him to find out what the family's circumstances were, and if they were really badly off, to give them a cartload of firewood out of turn.

Catching only the last words, which made such pleasant hearing, the peasant contrived after all to bump his forehead on the floor by way of clinching the matter. Yakushkin turned away with a gesture of annoyance and hurried out to join his pupils.

"That is what you get for trying to make amends for other people's sins," he thought. "The peasants have suffered so much at the hands of the landowners that they no longer believe in their good intentions!"

At the lesson Yakushkin relaxed. He had twelve pupils, all bright, merry boys, who were quick at learning the three R's. He began telling them episodes from Russian history, and was just warming to the subject, when the loud voice of one of his neighbours, a landowner, sounded outside.

"Where's the master? Come on, I want the master!"

And anticipating any possible announcement of his person, Limokhin, tall, boisterous, known throughout the neighbourhood as a gambler and a dog lover, strode into the room. The moment he caught sight of Yakushkin he shouted: "I've come to settle that business about the mill! Seeing that the river's the boundary between our estates, there's no reason why we should not go partners in building the mill."

Yakushkin dismissed the boys.

"We shall put in an extra hour tomorrow," he said.

Arrangements about the mill being concluded, the landowner said with a sly wink: "Considering your youth, my dear fellow, I never would have thought you were such a practical man. I daresay you know what you're doing in teaching those boys. With music thrown in, and a bit o' singing, each of the brats will be worth double his price."

"In this respect I do not share the views common to your set," Yakushkin said frowning. "I do not trade in human beings. While I was abroad my uncle, who was managing the estate, agreed to sell two local musicians to young Count Kamensky—"

"The Field-Marshal's son? Oh, you can fleece that one, he can afford it," Limokhin interposed knowingly.

"When I met the Count he told me that he owed me four thousand and offered to make out a deed of purchase."

"And did you?" Limokhin asked with interest.

"What I did was to give those musicians their freedom there and then. My uncle, and possibly Count Kamensky, thought I was mad."

"That's what your neighbours will think, too, my dear fellow, if you continue on those lines," Limokhin said earnestly. "You'll be a sort of odd fish among us with this enlightenment of yours. Let me tell you, sir," he said, dropping his voice, "there are rumours abroad that whole secret societies have cropped up in St. Petersburg and Moscow. All made up of men like you, young army officers! But here your neighbours are what they are, whether you like it or not. One of them, just right of Zhukovo, keeps his pack of fox-hounds and greyhounds much better than he does his serfs, who live by begging. Your other neighbour, the one on your left, came down to me the other day four-in-hand, with a lackey and postilion. We played cards for two days and nights running, and he gambled away his coach-and-four, lackey, postilion and all. Lucky for him he won his own back on the housemaid—would you believe it! But never mind, I'll even the score next time. Yes, sir, that's the kind of neighbours you have. That's what the majority of land-owners are like here. Forgive an old man for saying so, but you and your ilk are something in the nature of oddities among us so far."

Limokhin laughed and took his leave. Yakushkin saw him out, sat down on the bench outside the porch and became lost in thought.

Even the most enlightened men of his acquaintance believed that the peasant ought to be in raptures if he merely received his personal freedom. What they overlooked was that the peasant, having no trade other than that of a ploughman, would have no land to plough when he got his personal freedom, and would die of starvation.

Yakushkin's confusion, nay genuine sorrow, was all the more painful when his well-meant intentions met with an unexpected rebuff on the part of his serfs.

It happened this way.

One day Yakushkin gathered the whole village round this very same porch. Deeply agitated and at the same time feeling something of a hero, since in freeing the peasants he was losing no small part of his income, he had made a short speech.

Somewhat disconcerted by the eyes trained upon him, some in curiosity, others in utter distrust and obvious mockery, Yakushkin had said:

"Now look here, my friends, this is what I offer you: all of you receive your personal freedom, and I make you a free gift of your cottages and gardens, your animals and implements...."

He had been obliged to pause for breath, so deeply agitated was he. He had vaguely expected this noble speech to be instantly hailed with exclamations of gratitude, with sobbing; possibly people would fall on their knees and bless him. But no one had said a word.

The old men had looked down: long habit had taught them not to trust their master; the young men had worn a guarded look. Not even the women had been affected.

"Perhaps they do not understand what I'm telling them," Yakushkin had thought, "or else they are so overwhelmed that they have lost their senses and tongues?"

At length an old man had spoken up. His speech had come heavily, as though he were turning mill-stones.

"Well ... er.... I mean to say, the cottage plots are just a hen patch. Much too small! And how about the spring crops, and winter crops? And what about the haymaking, when it comes to that?"

Other voices had chimed in:

"It's no use without the land!"

"We never had enough bread as it is, and now we'll see none at all!"

"Yes you will—in your dreams!" a mocking voice had shouted.

There had been laughter among the crowd. "Depend on the partisan to blurt it out!"

Yakushkin had glanced in some confusion at Osip Karpenko, the partisan, and said, with a feeling of annoyance at his own embarrassment: "I shall lease the land out to the freemen. Well, do you agree?"

"We can't afford to rent land," a burly peasant had said. "Yet we've got to raise a crop whatever we do. It's a fine pickle whichever way you look at it."

"Now I ask you, sir, how can a man make a living without he raises a crop," quavered an old man with snow-white hair.

"The land is mine," Yakushkin had said coldly and doggedly. "I repeat, if anyone wants to rent it he can do so."

"Heigh-ho, master..." the old man began, then broke off with a hopeless gesture.

* * *

"There's a gulf between us," Yakushkin repeated bitterly as he paced his study. "We and the peasants will never see eye to eye, never. What chance is there of winning their confidence so long as we are always at liberty to barter any one of them for a greyhound. Our

only hope is the Secret Society—it alone can solve these vexed questions.”

He tore open the envelope and began reading Fonvizin's letter. Immediately he experienced a wild joy—the General was inviting him to come to Moscow at once on the affairs of the Society.

His departure from Zhukovo, necessitated by force of circumstances, would be a welcome respite to him after his failure with the peasants. But as he went on reading his face changed. On coming to the end he ran through the letter a second time and hastily burnt it in the fire-place.

Fonvizin wrote that Prince Ivan Shcherbatov, Yakushkin's friend and namesake, was involved in the “Semyonovsky incident.”

Second-Captain Shcherbatov's company had behaved with extreme effrontery during that “incident.” Although the Prince had had nothing to do with the affair, being on leave at the time, he was charged in connection with an intercepted letter in which he had expressed his regret that the officers had not sided with the men, who had voluntarily followed their unfairly arrested comrades into the fortress. Fonvizin quoted Shcherbatov's exact words: “To lag behind the soldiers in their noble resolve reflects small honour upon us.”

Giving his valet orders to have the carriage ready for his departure for Moscow and his bags packed the next morning, Yakushkin, as usual, went for a long walk, but he could not compose his agitated thoughts. The only occupation he could give his mind to pending his departure was to go through his diary notes concerning the “Semyonovsky incident,” in which a close friend of his—Shcherbatov—was unexpectedly involved.

Yakushkin opened the drawer of his bureau and got out a thick note-book containing Pushkin's “seditious” verses and sheets of paper on which was scrupulously

recorded all that he had been able to learn about the so-called "Semyonovsky incident" from the verbal accounts and letters of eye-witnesses. He became engrossed in reading.

On the insistence of Grand Duke Nicholas, who considered that Yakov Potyomkin, the commander of the Semyonovsky Regiment, had spoilt his men, Colonel Schwarz, who had hitherto commanded an army regiment, was appointed to "tighten up" discipline. Schwarz's brutality was a byword among the troops. In one village where he had been stationed with his regiment people pointed out a mound where soldiers whom he had flogged to death lay buried. In fact, the mound became known as Schwarz's Grave. Under Yakov Potyomkin, their former commander, the soldiers had found life a bit more bearable. Potyomkin had made away with the cudgel and forbidden the officers to ill-treat the men and swear at them. He wanted the browbeaten and down-trodden soldier to feel himself a human being again. The commander showed a paternal interest in all the details of routine and living conditions, which mean so much to a soldier.

All the more galling was it to the men when Schwarz, who had come to replace Potyomkin, restored the hateful system of Prussianism with its ruthless, brutal practices.

Veterans with military decorations as well as raw recruits suffered at Schwarz's hands. He pulled their whiskers and spat in their faces. He drove the weary soldiers to his house for extra "toe drill" and prostrated himself on the floor the better to be able to verify the line.

Grand Duke Nicholas not only winked at Schwarz's doings but sanctioned them by personal example. From time to time he would have a party of forty or so old lance-corporals called out to the palace, where, under the brilliant ball-room lights, His Highness would personally give lessons in manual exercises. In conclusion the

dog-tired lance-corporals would be march-drilled until dazed. They held their breath for fear lest they slip on the palace parquet, polished smooth as a mirror.

Often, to humour her husband, Nicholas's frail young wife Alexandra Feodorovna would take up a position on the right flank next to a huge grenadier and stick out a daintily shod foot.

Shocked at this revival of the Gatchina* drill-mania, the old regimental commanders and other decent officers hastened to secure a transfer to the army. The young officers of the new replacements laid themselves out to curry favour with their superiors. At inspection reviews the practice of receiving soldiers' statements, which alone could curb the tyranny of cruel commanders, had fallen into disuse. This was now looked upon as seditious conduct and the man who dared to complain came in for the very cudgel against which he protested.

Schwarz's cruelty at last became unbearable, and to get him removed, the soldiers resorted to what was virtually an unheard-of breach of military discipline. On October 16, 1820, they went out into the corridor without leave and at an unprescribed hour and notified Sergeant-Major Bragin that they respectfully demanded the immediate presence of Company Commander Kashkarov in order to make their request known to him.

The men behaved without disrespect, but displayed such firm resolution that the sergeant-major was impelled to call out the company commander, who in his turn called out the battalion commander. The soldiers demanded Schwarz's removal and the appointment of some other commander in his place.

"We can't stand Colonel Schwarz's cruelties any more!" they said.

* An allusion to Paul I's mania for army drilling carried out at Gatchina (near St. Petersburg).—*Ed.*

The battalion commander went to see Schwarz in the hope that he would come down and calm the men by his personal presence and go into their complaint.

Conscious of a multitude of sins against the soldiers, Schwarz took fright and rushed straight off to Grand Duke Michael, the brigade commander, to report a mutiny in the Semyonovsky Regiment.

The youthful Michael, who outdid Nicholas himself in disciplinarian zeal, interrogated the company for several hours to discover the ringleaders, the initiators of this "corridor interviewing."

The soldiers refused to give their comrades away.

In the evening Adjutant-General Vasilchikov lured the unarmed company into Corps Headquarters, placed the men under arrest and sent them to the Peter and Paul Fortress.

When the Semyonovsky men heard of this they broke out of barracks shouting: "Company One is locked up and we're expected to go to sleep! We are all in for it, and if we're going to hang let us hang together!"

Stirred up by the arrest of Company One, the regiment refused to return to the barracks. Feeling ran high against Schwarz, through whom, they realized, hundreds of innocent men would now die an agonizing death under the rods.

One platoon rushed off to Schwarz's lodgings. This would have been the end of the Colonel had he not taken it into his head to escape merited death by hiding in a dung-heap. The stables had been cleaned out in his yard and he dived into the huge heap. No one thought of looking for him there.

The soldiers found the Colonel's full dress coat somewhere, hoisted it on a stick, and amid jeers and curses tore it to shreds.

When General Miloradovich, accompanied by ex-Commander Potyomkin, came riding up to the scene, the

soldiers gave them a friendly enough greeting and even shouted to Potyomkin: "Nothing like this could have happened in the regiment when you were here!"

The commanding officers were greatly impressed when the soldiers, with a calm dignity and firmness, amazing in such well-drilled men, announced:

"We are not going back to the barracks until we are promised that Colonel Schwarz will be removed and Company One is released. We must have Company One to tag onto!"

Vasilchikov, the corps commander for whom the regiment was always a mere machine, showed himself even then incapable of regarding the soldier as a human being. Cursing the regiment for "traitors" and "mutineers," he rapped out in a fury: "To the fortress with you!"

And the old Semyonovsky Regiment, keeping perfect discipline, formed into columns and marched off to the fortress in a body.

A courier was dispatched posthaste to Tsar Alexander, who was at the congress in Troppau, bearing news of an event hitherto unprecedented in the Russian army—the mutiny of an entire regiment. How would His Majesty have the mutineers dealt with?

Everyone expected from the Tsar a wise decision.

"That's his wisdom!" Yakushkin thought with a grim smile, unfolding the sheet of paper with Pushkin's "seditious" verse attached to the manuscript text of the "Semyonovsky Regiment Incident":

*Up-fostered to the drumstick's rattle,
Our gallant Tsar seemed born for battle:
From Austerlitz the hero fled,
In 1812 he lost his head;
He was an expert, though, at drill,
But finally got tired of that,
So now our hero tries his skill
At what he calls a diplomat.*

This "diplomat" at the time was having it dinned into his ears by Metternich that "all thrones will be overthrown unless resolute measures are taken against their enemies without delay."

Other influences apart, the interests of harsh drilling in the army had always lain closer to the royal martinet's heart than any other affairs. Deciding that the mutiny in the Semyonovsky Regiment was due, naturally, to "secret Russian *Carbonari*," of whom he was so afraid, Alexander lost no time in sending the courier back with the cruel sentence: "Company One to be court-martialled in the fortress. Other battalions to be disbanded and dispersed among the army regiments and garrisons."

Above these words in Yakushkin's manuscript someone had added an expressive remark: "We can only thank the Tsar for this unexpected help! The Semyonovsky men will not come to the army regiments empty-handed—they will come charged with gun-powder!"

Yakushkin came to the last page.

"The colours and musicians to remain in the regimental roster, and the new Semyonovsky Regiment to be formed of Grenadier companies from other army regiments."

The Tsar gave strict orders for the ringleaders to be discovered at all costs, and a Colonel Zhukovsky, a past master at interrogation, was put in charge of the case. He immediately tackled Bragin, "since it was the business of a sergeant-major to be the ears and eyes of his company and nip any mutiny in the bud."

The regiment being confined in the fortress, the ringleaders were safe from detection among the mass. But no sooner did Zhukovsky resort to the tried and trusty method of intimidation—"threat of beating to death with the rod"—than he was able to report to his superiors: "After the promises given to Bragin, he noticeably took heart and began to speak up. Under the circumstances it

is advisable to grant him preferential rations. That may loosen his tongue still more."

Bragin told everything that was demanded of him and more besides. He caused the ruin of the regiment's favourite young officer Kashkarov by testifying that he had immediately handed the latter a list of the ring-leaders to be passed on to his superiors. When asked why the list had not been passed on and what he had done with it, Kashkarov said he had not thought it of any importance and had mislaid it.

Kashkarov, too, was remanded for trial by court-martial.

The manuscript concluded with an item of news which was not without interest.

"It is known to a certainty from military men that only one intelligent and decent man, Auditor-General Bulichev, had the courage to 'reserve his opinion.' He submitted the following statement:

" 'Considering Colonel Schwarz's actions in the light of the law, I cannot pass over the fact that the soldiers were exceedingly ill-used by him. Furthermore, Colonel Schwarz went to the extent of summarily beating men with the flat of his sword, including soldiers awarded military decorations for meritorious service. I believe that Colonel Schwarz's treatment of the soldiers is alone to blame for their insurrection. Therefore I consider it unfair to inflict corporal punishment upon the soldiers. As for Colonel Schwarz, he should be deprived of rank and decorations and reduced to the ranks.' "

"I doubt whether the opinion of that excellent man will be taken into consideration!" exclaimed the nameless correspondent on the margin of his report.

"The deuce it has!" Yakushkin commented aloud. He carefully collected the sheets and locked them up again in his bureau. "They have exaggerated the guilt of the soldiers and will most assuredly flog them to death. As

for Schwarz, he will be receiving awards again before long, I shouldn't wonder."

Yakushkin felt as if an oppressive weight had settled upon his shoulders. For the sake of distraction he got up and went out to the stable and the coach-house. Everything there was in order. The old coachman was cleaning and greasing the wheels, and had laid in a supply of oats for the horses during the journey.

"Fine weather for a journey, sir," the coachman said in a friendly tone. He was glad to be going to Moscow, where he had a married son.

Yakushkin had forgotten this family circumstance, and read a personal meaning into his coachman's amiability, thinking with pleasure: "The peasants can't help liking me! Have they ever seen anything but good from me?"

He walked round the orchard, then decided to have a look at the hayloft. The hay would have to be packed tighter, he thought; no doubt it had settled down. He passed through the wicket, but suddenly halted, and stepped behind some trees. Lyonka's drunken father was coming down the path, supported by two tipsy cronies, and all three were speaking in loud voices.

"Eh, I've fooled away my last money," Lyonka's father was wailing. "Why did I have to go and spend it on drink? Through misery, that's why. I'll learn your Lyonka a trade, the master says. As if a trade can keep him safe from trouble. Soon as the master fancies a game o' cards, he'll gamble him away, trade and all."

"Unless he plays for bigger stakes," one of the peasants said. "They're all tarred with the same brush, those gentry."

The peasants walked across the grass-plot towards the village, and Yakushkin watched them going, thinking sadly: "They don't trust me...."

He did not go to the hayloft, afraid that he might run into somebody else. There was only one person he cared to see, meetings with whom always gave him pleasure and seemed to refresh him—and that was the bee-keeper Polikarpich, a retired soldier who had lost his leg at Borodino.* Yakushkin had manumitted him and given him a little house with a vegetable plot. Polikarpich came to love bee-keeping and had settled down in Zhukovo for the rest of his lonely life.

Yakushkin always enjoyed his heart-to-heart talks with Polikarpich. Both had been through the campaigns of the Patriotic War and were full of reminiscences. Indeed, the old soldier was fond of a good talk. He was not so very old, by the way, and had come by the name of “Grandpa” on account of his bald head, a thing seldom met with among the peasantry.

“The roots went weak on account of my wounds, and my hair started coming out like the oakum in a log wall,” he explained.

He had a neat little hut, the walls of which were hung about inside with birch besoms and fragrant herbs.

“You have to smell sweet to handle the bees. Those little creatures will go for you at once if you’re sweaty.”

The old man had carefully whittled the stump for his wooden leg himself and painted it sky blue, a colour, he averred, esteemed by the bees.

“Ah, Ivan Dmitrievich, welcome, sir. You haven’t been here for ages,” Polikarpich said in a pleased tone. He was wearing homespun blue trousers and a clean white shirt with a St. George pinned to it.

“Would you like some fresh honey with a cucumber, sir?”

* *Borodino*, a village 110 km. from Moscow, famous as the scene of one of the greatest battles in history (Aug. 26, 1812) between the Russian army and the troops of Napoleon.—*Ed.*

It was a warm evening, and they sat down at the open window of the old man's hut. The host laid an embroidered tea-cloth on the table and brought in fragrant amber-coloured honey-combs and a few large cucumbers.

"Well, I am going to Moscow, Polikarpich," said Yakushkin. "I may be gone for a long time."

"You know best," the old man said politely, handing him a fat cucumber split in halves and thickly smeared with honey. "That's the way we Smolensk folks eat it. This honey is like butter!"

"It's good honey, very good!" Yakushkin said. He felt at ease straight away. "You haven't forgotten 1812, Polikarpich, have you?"

"I haven't, and no more has my leg! It feels the weather cruelly. The nights are longish when you don't sleep, and what else can I think of except those times! I never start thinking but I see the old Ryazan road before my eyes. Right and left fields stretching away for miles, and my goodness, the people on them fields! Just swarming like a disturbed ant heap. Muzhiks, and womenfolk with children, and soldiers, no end of 'em. Old Mother-Russia was all up in arms to drive the French off our land. If you find a dead bee in the honey, don't let it put you off, Ivan Dmitrievich," the old man interrupted himself. "Just lay it aside, that's right. The honey's all the sweeter for having a bee drowned in it."

Yakushkin laughed. He was listening to Polikarpich with pleasure.

"And to think that at first we were just a handful against those swarms of Frenchmen!" the old man proceeded. "And did we chase 'em! A many were drowned in the rivers and died in the snow!"

"And only thirty thousand or so got back to tell the tale," Yakushkin said with a smile, and told Polikarpich

how the French minister Maret, meeting Napoleon, who was fleeing from Smorgon in a Russian sleigh, asked the Emperor in dismay: "Where is your army?" And Napoleon answered curtly: "The army is no more."

Old Polikarpich's toothless mouth spread wide in a hearty laugh. "The French army's no more, eh? That's the truest thing he ever said!"

"And Borodino, old chap?" Yakushkin went on with animation. "Don't you see, it was there of all places that Napoleon counted on routing the Russian army."

"And if he had, Russia would have had to cry quits. Oh, we understood that much all right. Only it worked out the other way—the Frenchman got caught in his own trap. He just made us fight like mad, and it was daring as won the day for us. Isn't that right?"

"Quite right, old man. All the plans which our great Kutuzov laid at that unforgettable Council in Fili,* when he decided Moscow's fate with tears of bitter grief—all those plans came true. The French set fire to Moscow, thinking to frighten us, but it didn't work. After Borodino the French army went to pieces. And Napoleon was a fine one, too—just imagine it, Polikarpich—he sat there amid the burning houses waiting for a deputation from the conquered city!"

"The devil he did!"

The old man jumped up with a half-eaten cucumber in his hand, as if he had only just learned of Napoleon's discomfiture.

"So he had to run away in a Russian sleigh, you say! And his reply to the minister was brief—the army's no more!"

"And d'you remember the partisans, Polikarpich?"

* *Council in Fili*—War Council (1812) in the village of Fili near Moscow at which Kutuzov decided to abandon Moscow without a fight.—*Ed.*

"I should say I do! Our muzhiks rose up at once, and partisan detachments sprang up all down the line. It's wonderful, the way they all rose up, whole villages at a time, without any military rules, mind you, and pitched into the French. And came off with flying colours, too! It wasn't long before those peasant detachments became as thick as flies. There were as many detachments as there were villages in the Frenchman's path. And let me tell you, as a military man, each of them was an ambush to the enemy."

"And a great support to our own troops," Yakushkin chimed in. His swarthy young face beamed.

"And our womenfolk didn't begrudge nothing either!" the old man shouted. "Nest eggs and wedding chests, everything put away for a rainy day was dragged out for our troops! They gave their defenders meat and drink!"

"And the partisans' weapons?" Yakushkin prompted slyly, prodding the old man's memory.

"Equipment, in a word!" the old man laughed. "One fellow would come straight out o' the woods like a frightsome bear, under him a shaggy little nag and himself looking like death with a scythe, and behind him a crowd, one carrying an axe, another a nail-pike or a boar-spear. The women who were at their stoves snatched up oven-forks! But they made good use of those oven-forks, let me tell you. Took prisoners whose teeth chattered—there was no escaping 'em. And I remember once," the old man said, dropping his voice to a confidential note, "our partisans decided to show off. They got hold of a French baggage-train and dressed up in French uniforms, like regular cuirassiers! All but got taken prisoners by our own men. Funniest thing you'd ever seen!"

"Yes, Kutuzov was right," said Yakushkin. "Napoleon

had no alternative but to retreat, because the war of 1812 was a real people's war."

He got up to take his leave and embraced Polikarpich.

The old man conducted his master through the beegarden, and with a glance down the path suddenly said joyfully: "Why, if that isn't Osip the partisan!"

Yakushkin stopped, awaiting the approach of a man of arresting appearance. Although he was of medium height, he looked tall because of his excessive leanness; he wore side whiskers, and his chin was clean-shaven. The empty socket of his right eye was covered with a black band—a "French souvenir" the peasants called it. Osip Karpenko had commanded a partisan detachment in the Smolensk Gubernia during the Patriotic War. As soon as he came into his estate, Yakushkin had given Osip his freedom.

Preserving his soldierly bearing Osip bowed and said: "Good evening, sir! I was going to wish Your Honour good-bye, but seeing as we've met, I shan't bother you any more."

Yakushkin listened to the partisan's voice with a feeling of hostility. He was thinking of the way the man had shouted mockingly outside his porch: "You will—in your dreams!"

"Where are you going?" asked Yakushkin.

"To my nephew Vasili in Novograd-Volynsky. He got his freedom, too, the other day. Wants to open a joiner's shop. As I'm an old carpenter he has sent for me to work with him."

"For what services did your nephew's master give him his freedom?"

"For no services at all," Osip said with a smile, and it seemed to Yakushkin as if his shrewd bright eye twinkled mockingly.

"Funny sort of landowner he is! Soon as he inherited the village he arrives and says to the muzhiks: 'You're

all freed, the whole lot of you, so you can divide my land up among yourselves! 'Don't have slaves,' he says, 'unless you want to be a slave yourself.' "

"What's his name?" Yakushkin said eagerly, taking out his pocket-book.

"Ivan Gorbachevsky, Second-Lieutenant of the Eighth Artillery Brigade, stationed in Novograd-Volynsky," the partisan reported with unconcealed pleasure.

Yakushkin wrote something down on a separate leaf of the book and handed it to Osip, saying: "Give that to the steward. When you're quite ready to go he will give you all you need for the journey."

"Thank you, sir," the partisan said, drawing himself up smartly.

Yakushkin hurried home, repeating to himself: "Ivan Gorbachevsky. Must be a freemason. I'll have to make inquiries about him."

It was getting quite dark. The birch copse was cool. Lights twinkled pleasantly, warmly, on the fringe of the woods, where the peasants were burning stubbed roots and preparing the clearing for winter tillage.

Yakushkin's sense of loneliness and his guarded attitude towards the peasants left him.

"Now this talk with Polikarpich was sincere enough and brotherly," he thought. "We found a common language after all. And why? Because we had both been fighting for a common cause in 1812, defending our country! That common cause has created mutual understanding."

"That means that our revolutionary work, too, must become the same common, popular cause the defence of our country was in 1812. Is it not for the good of the people that our Secret Society is working! But perhaps we are not going about it the right way, not the way the people needs?"

He could find no answer to this vexing question, and

was reminded of the memorable words of that great man—Radishchev, whom his contemporaries, with full justice, had called “the spectator without spectacles.”

Yakushkin had made a special note of those words when reading the rare copy of his *Journey from Petersburg to Moscow*,* which had fallen into his hands for a quick perusal. The author, in impassioned language, had said that the people would receive their freedom only when they won it themselves.

CHAPTER TWO

In 1816, shortly after the war, the first secret revolutionary society was formed in St. Petersburg. It called itself the Salvation League, and somewhat later “Society of the True and Loyal Sons of the Fatherland.”

How odious those young members of Russia’s wealthiest and noblest families must have found the conditions of life at home to make them choose such a dangerous path as revolutionary conspiracy, and to risk their well-being, their personal liberty and perhaps their lives.

This perplexed the minds of those of their contemporaries whose sole aim in life was the attainment of life’s blessings, such as wealth and a brilliant career.

However, this noble self-sacrifice on the part of the best element of the military youth proved to be a historical necessity. The Russian nation had recently won a great victory in the Patriotic War and had settled the destinies of other nations whose noble liberators they had been. Proud in this knowledge, Russian officers had returned convinced that life at home would now be different, much better than before. At any rate, that hateful

* *A Journey from Petersburg to Moscow* was a book that harshly condemned the serf-owning regime. Its author, Radishchev, was sentenced to death, the sentence being commuted to exile.—*Ed.*

system of Prussian drill introduced by Paul would never be restored.

After the campaigns they had been through, it became quite clear to military men that the main reason for the Russian army's defeat at Austerlitz was its deviation from the "Suvorov spirit," whose place was taken by parade-ground drill. Progressive military men were overjoyed when, early in the war, a manual for officers was circulated among the troops, restoring the spirit of Suvorov's rules with such instructions as: "Although severity for real offences is a necessity, the officer can and should earn the honourable title of a friend of the soldier."

The soldiers came home with unhealed wounds and St. George's crosses, full of sanguine hopes for liberation from serfdom.

Great was the general disappointment and sorrow, however, when things at home proved to be even worse than they had been before.

The country had safely weathered the storm of war. In the winged words of the Crown Prince Constantine, "war had spoilt discipline." The Tsar set about rectifying this after his own manner, the Gatchina manner. He put the screw on so tight that the soldiers could scarcely breathe.

Parade drilling was made the sole and compulsory interest of the officers, who had only just become conscious of their human dignity as a result of the victorious war. For the soldiers, there began again the lifelong grind of military service and punishment by the rod in a greater degree than ever before.

It soon became clear to everyone that the wily Alexander would not give the peasants their freedom nor the soldiers any indulgence. The Tsar vested great power in Arakcheyev, a cruel dull-witted man, whose orders had equal force with the royal edicts.

The constant striving on the part of progressive Russian society to free the country from the slavery and afflictions due, as everyone realized, to the autocracy, created a tension which demanded an outlet. And so like-minded young officers, who lived together in the barracks, and their closest friends decided to set up a secret revolutionary society.

Alexander Muravyov, a Colonel of the General Staff, formed the secret society known as True and Loyal Sons of the Fatherland, which included his brother Mikhail and two relatives, Sergei and Matvei Muravyov-Apostol. Both were Semyonovsky officers, like their comrade Ivan Yakushkin, who also joined this first Secret Society.

Nikita Muravyov, another relative of the Society's founder, introduced his cousin Mikhail Lunin and Pavel Pestel, who drew up the Society's charter.

Lunin was much older than the other members of the Secret Society, and his mature political views either startled his comrades or were ridiculed by them. The idea that it was necessary first of all to remove the autocrat from power had not occurred to anyone until Lunin submitted to Pestel and Nikita Muravyov an elaborate plan for arresting the Tsar on his way to Tsarskoye Selo.

He wholeheartedly approved the Society's charter which Pestel had drawn up. The gist of this charter was that the time had come to take the cause of liberation into their own hands, that in place of the autocracy it was time to give the country quite a different form of government, based on rigid laws which would safeguard the rights and liberties of all citizens.

But time was passing and the members of the Secret Society had not yet started revolutionary action. As though fulfilling the prophecy of "the spectator without spectacles," the wave of popular wrath and rebellion kept rising. In 1819 the Chuguyevo mutiny broke out,

provoked by Arakcheyev's cruelties in the military colonies, and in 1820 the "Semyonovsky incident" occurred. The members of the Secret Society, however, were unable to come to an agreement and begin revolutionary action.

Pestel's charter was adopted by all the members of the Society in 1817 under considerable pressure on his part. But no sooner was Pestel called away to Mitau than changes were made in it.

The moderate members of the Society together with the new adherents, officers from the nobility, inaugurated in Moscow the Prosperity League, which was joined by almost all the members of the Salvation League.

In the new programme the demand for a constitution was superseded by sentiments such as "the hope of goodwill on the part of the government" and "gradually influencing public opinion." Political problems were relegated to the background and "philanthropy, morality and enlightenment" were put forward in their place.

Opinions divided into moderate and radical. The adherents of resolute action were headed by Pestel, who was transferred to the town of Tulchin in November 1818. Captain Burtsev, who arrived there six months later, turned out to be his chief opponent and stubborn adherent of the principle of "slow action leading to moral reformation."

Pestel mockingly remarked that this "reformation" would take centuries, and even then, as the saying goes, "there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip." He was for a revolutionary rising as an immediate aim, and believed that morals could be reformed only by good government founded on just laws. While the advocates of slow action shied not only at bloodshed but at all and every form of sharp struggle, Pestel argued that the whole meaning of the Society's activities was to aim a blow at the autocracy in order to overthrow it as quickly as possible.

When the moderate members of the Society reminded him of how the Convention had followed the same path in the French Revolution and what bloody horrors its deeds had culminated in, Pestel declared without hesitation: "The work of the Convention happens to be the wisest phase in the French Revolution!"

Pestel further declared publicly at a meeting of the Society's members that the logical development of revolutionary thought in Russia would inevitably lead to regicide and at least a ten-year dictatorship of the new government if the conquests of the revolution were to be safeguarded.

This idea simply frightened the majority. Men came from the North and South to Moscow, complaining fearfully to Alexander Muravyov and General Fonvizin, the sober-minded founders of the Society, about the "fascinating" influence of Pestel, who ridiculed their opinions. They suspected Pestel of Napoleonic ambitions, of intentions to personally seize the power after the rising.

The official position of this Colonel, who resided at General Headquarters of the Second Army in Tulchin in anticipation of receiving a regiment, was another disconcerting factor. Pestel was known to have considerable influence with the Chief of Staff Kiselyov, and virtually to control the army.

And so the moderate members of the Prosperity League, wishing to evade Pestel's compelling eloquence, decided to discuss their affairs preliminarily in Pestel's absence at a conference in Moscow to be held in January 1821.

Fearing to divulge the date of the conference even in a letter by private messenger, General Fonvizin had summoned Yakushkin to Moscow. Thence Yakushkin was sent to Tulchin with instructions to invite Burtsev and Komarov, and, most important of all, to bring with him to Moscow the long-wished-for young General Mikhail

Orlov, a very prominent man whose revolutionary educational activities set him apart as a man of quite independent views.

It was November when Yakushkin drove up to Tulchin. The lovely southern autumn was still full of summer warmth. Woods of sturdy oaks, alternating with broad-leaved maples already touched with russet tints, stretched along the roadside. The woods came to an end and the road ran through black-earth fields from which the crops had been harvested. Black birds strutted over the balks, pecking the grains left over in the stubble.

Suddenly the carriage stopped.

"What's the matter?" Yakushkin asked, putting his head out.

"I nearly ran over a man, a drunkard—just lying there in the middle of the road and won't move. I'll move him in a minute!"

The coachman raised his whip, but Yakushkin checked him, and went up to the man lying in the roadway.

His emaciated body was covered with rags. He did not stir, but there was anguish in his dilated eyes as he looked up at Yakushkin.

"Are you ill? Can't you walk?" Yakushkin asked solicitously.

"Your Honour," the man said in a weak but clear voice, which had no hint of rustic accent in it, "either give me a lift to Tulchin or let your horses trample me to death. I'm at the end of my strength."

The man swooned. With the aid of his coachman Yakushkin carried him into the carriage. The coachman grumbled at his master and advised him to move the beggar to the roadside and leave him there. "He may die on the way for all you know, and you'll bring a corpse to town. There'll be no end of trouble then!"

The poor devil came to himself in the comfortable carriage after a few gulps of brandy and a solid sand-

wich, and when asked what he was doing in the steppe so far away from human habitation, he answered in a much stronger voice: "I'll tell you the truth, sir. You've been so kind to pick me up that I can trust you not to give me away. I'm a Chuguyevo man from the military colony, a runaway."

"You people mutinied in 1819," Yakushkin said with sympathy. "Did many suffer for it?"

"About three hundred were executed, and seventy were flogged to death. Men were sentenced to from three to twelve thousand strokes of the rod—who could stand it? After running that gauntlet a man was carried out in bleeding chunks."

The coachman suddenly reined in the horses.

"My nephew was killed there," he said, turning round. "At first he wrote they were fairly well off. Iron roofs with weathercocks showing the way the wind blows. Streets swept clean, painted houses, curtains like those the priest's wife has—starched, you know. Ate by the bell, like pond fishes, all at a time, you know. Did everything by the clock—washing the floors, going to the bath, shaving beards. If you shaved at the wrong time you were in for a flogging! Did nothing but flog people the livelong day. That's how my nephew died—they flogged him to death."

The coachman lashed the horses. The shadow of a smile flitted across the haggard face of the runaway.

"That's the honest truth, sir," he said. "The military colonies only look prosperous from the outside. Believe me or not, but Count Arakcheyev even had cast-iron cupids made on the oven-doors."

"A tribute to the sentimentality of the age," Yakushkin said with a wry smile. "I daresay the boys broke their wings off?"

"And got a flogging for their pains—no one will ever try it again! Cupids nothing! Living people are mated

by order like beasts. It's a wonder they stand it! Folks still remember the savage reprisals of 1819, they daren't squeak. They wouldn't say a word if you were to saw them in two. But I couldn't stand it...."

Emotion choked further utterance. "But what was *your* grievance?" Yakushkin asked kindly. "Don't be afraid, you are speaking to a friend who sympathizes with you."

He pressed the man's hand, and the latter gave him a grateful look out of harassed eyes.

"Men like you are our only hope," he said softly. "I have read a good deal and have made acquaintances among the seminarists—they explained a few things to me."

"Tell me all about it," Yakushkin said gently. "We have to know how to help you."

"The military colonies got orders from the Count to pair people off at Easter Week in this way: the steward picks out all the girls of sixteen and all the boys of eighteen, and just decides on his own—supposedly for business reasons—this one is to marry that one. Of course, personal inclinations were not considered at all. As a chorister I was an exception. I had a sweetheart and had already received permission to marry, but all of a sudden the steward took a fancy to my girl. He decided to marry her to a wretched old man with whom he had an arrangement of his own. I kept begging her to run away with me, but she wouldn't hear of it. 'My strength will give out,' she says, 'and I'll get you into trouble. They'll flog you. Run away, do, because if you stay here you'll only do murder.' One night she hanged herself, and I ran away. If I had stayed I would have killed Arakcheyev for certain! I took pity on the muzhiks—hundreds of them would have suffered for it, besides myself."

"And where do you intend to go now?"

"I'll take a side turning before we get to Tulchin. The border isn't far from there, and once I'm across the Danube the Cossack Raskolniks will take me in. Lots of our people have run over to them."

"But you aren't strong enough!"

"I am now, thanks to you, sir. Till I met you I hadn't had anything to eat for three days. Hunger took it out of me."

Yakushkin gave the man some money, clean clothes and a pair of boots. And when the latter pointed out the spot where he wished to get off, Yakushkin stopped the carriage.

"Well, good luck!" he said.

At a bend in the road just short of Tulchin a man got out of Yakushkin's carriage with a well-filled knapsack on his back and presently disappeared from view. The coachman followed him with his eyes and shook his head.

"Gone and given him your best boots!" he muttered.

It was some time before Yakushkin could compose himself. He thought with indignation of the military colonies, which excited the hatred of the whole country and the horror of the soldiers. The harsh regime which Arakcheyev's ingenuity had established there and under which life was regulated to the minutest detail, proved to be such a hell for the Russian peasant that he never ceased to mutiny. Arakcheyev had cavalry and artillery called out, and the peasants were trampled down, fired upon and made to run the gauntlet. Arakcheyev's reports to the Tsar, divulged by persons in attendance, had a sinister note in the margin against many of the names, written in Arakcheyev's neat hand: "Died after appropriate punishment."

These were men who had been sentenced to run the gauntlet of a thousand soldiers up to ten times and more.

Alexander said with insensate cruelty: "The military colonies will stay as I have planned them if I have to

pave the road to Chudovo with the corpses of the mutineers."

"We're coming to Tulchin," the coachman said, whipping up the horses.

The steppe gave place to hilly country, and suddenly a small town appeared. The few scattered two-storied houses with balconies formed a sharp contrast to the poor clay huts of the Jewish and Polish population. These houses were surrounded with poplars and acacias and Russian military units were quartered in them.

Ivan Burtsev, Captain of the Moscow Regiment and an old acquaintance of Yakushkin's, greeted him very cordially in his elegant house. He announced that his house was his guest's and treated him to an excellent dinner. After dinner they passed into the smoking-room. Following a Moldavian custom the orderly got down on one knee, as though he were being knighted, placed saucers under long chibouks, and lit them. As he was tiptoeing out of the room Burtsev said to him: .

"Look here, don't let anyone in! If they insist, just tell them the Captain's out of town."

Burtsev did not look much older than Yakushkin. He had the tall soldierly figure of a Guardsman. Born of a noble family in the Ryazan Gubernia, he was already serving in the army in 1812 as ensign and distinguished himself by exceptional bravery during the campaigns. He was appointed adjutant to Kiselyov, the Chief of Staff, at Tulchin.

He was aware that Yakushkin did not share Pestel's radical views, but he would have liked to see personal animosity added to this, for he himself keenly envied Pestel's extraordinary endowments and influence.

Burtsev proceeded to his task in a roundabout way, with an outward show of artlessness.

Like everybody else, he had heard of Yakushkin's

abortive attempt to free his serfs, who had simply rejected his offer of freedom.

"We've been talking a good deal here about your noble intention," Burtsev said ingratiatingly, after evincing a sympathetic interest in Yakushkin's country affairs. "Believe me, we felt deeply for you when we heard of that crass stupidity of the muzhiks, who failed to appreciate your noble impulses."

Yakushkin, who could not stand flattery, frowned and said somewhat brusquely: "It's my own fault for not having understood the peasants' interests. It didn't occur to me that freedom without the land was as bad a yoke as serfdom. I see things differently now. Hasty action like that was senseless. I'm teaching the children now, have started a school."

"I admire you," Burtsev said with a scrape of his foot. "I was really shocked when I heard that Pestel ridiculed such fine impulses."

"What could he have found in them to ridicule?" Yakushkin flared up, his pride pricked. "Inexperience is no sin."

"Pestel is a law unto himself. 'Individual efforts to emancipate the peasants are simply ridiculous,' he said, holding you up as an example of what he mockingly calls 'gentlemanly vagaries.'"

Yakushkin suddenly laughed, and his face grew quite young.

"I like that definition of my agrarian utopias, mind you," he said. "'Gentlemanly vagaries!' That is something we are all guilty of despite our good intentions. We must get to know the people before disposing of their fate."

"Pestel keeps dragging in Radishchev as an example," Burtsev interrupted excitedly. He acted like a man availing himself at long last of an opportunity of airing his grievances. "Lately Pestel constantly rounds off his

speech with a paraphrase from Radishchev's *Journey*: 'Never as long as the world exists will there be an example of a Tsar voluntarily relinquishing an iota of his power,' and consequently that power must be taken from him *by force*! Pestel ever more obstinately insists on the fulfilment of Radishchev's insane behests, and ignores the fact that a good many of the members of the Prosperity League hold the same opinion of Radishchev as the Empress Catherine when she called him 'a rebel worse than Pugachov.' "

Burtsev restlessly paced the room. He was a good-looking, well-knit man; everything about him was seemly and pleasant, yet not a single feature, mannerism or the sound of his voice impinged itself upon the memory.

Observing him, Yakushkin thought ironically: "Adjutant."

"By the way, Ivan Dmitrievich," Burtsev said suddenly, "I'm sorry, it quite slipped my mind while we were talking—but there's been a search at your friend Prince Fyodor Shakhovskoy's house, you know. They were looking for letters from Shcherbatov, his wife's brother."

Yakushkin paled. Natalia Shcherbatova was an old flame of his, and her rejection of his suit had been a hard blow to him. However, when she married Shakhovskoy, he had accepted the situation with strange composure, like a man who has deposited his treasure in a safe place. Shakhovskoy was his friend and the best of men.

"It is this same Shakhovskoy, you know, whom Sergei Muravyov dubbed the Tiger—and the name stuck," Burtsev said cheerfully. "Fonvizin and your other friends are worried. The Secret Society is being carefully watched, you know. I was wondering if they hadn't found out something about that memorable meeting where you volunteered to assassinate the Tsar, and Shakhovskoy

earned his nickname by supporting you so fiercely. I believe that was at. . . . Now where was it?"

"At Alexander Muravyov's house," Yakushkin said. "We had been speaking about the new horrors of life in the military colonies and read out Trubetskoy's letter from St. Petersburg. Everyone had been greatly worked up. The letter had said that the Tsar, in his hatred of the Russians, intended to transfer the capital to Warsaw and annex several old Russian territories to Poland. Everyone had taken Trubetskoy's statement on faith. The Russian Tsar's contempt for the Russian people is so well known that it lent colour to the report."

"Yes, his amiable maxims went the rounds of the Guards and bit deep into men's hearts," Burtsev interposed.

"We know all that, and a good deal more," Yakushkin proceeded: "And then Alexander Muravyov had begun to speak, his face white. 'We must put an end to the reign of Alexander!' he had said. 'Let us cast lots who's to strike the blow.' I remember as if it were today. I felt as though the ground were slipping away from under my feet, and I got up and said—my voice, mind you, was quite firm—'It's too late to cast lots! I have already decided to kill the Tsar and have it all planned. When he goes to the palace from the cathedral in the Kremlin I'll lie in wait for him with a brace of pistols—one for him, the other for myself. I shan't miss and shan't let anyone down. Dead men tell no tales!' And I would have done it, too. At this point Shakhovskoy, beside himself, had cried out loudly: 'And you can count on me, too. The thing has to be done at once, without delay!' "

"That was when he was dubbed the Tiger," Burtsev inserted with an indulgent smile. "But the whole meeting was startled, I heard, and begged the two of you to tarry a while with committing regicide!"

"To be sure, they were greatly upset, and started to

assure us both that we were ill and raving. I remember losing my temper and offering Fonvizin to play a game of chess there and then to prove that my head was clear and sober, and I had the satisfaction of beating him." Yakushkin laughed. "Childish, of course, but the idea of having beaten him still tickles me."

"Regicide can do nothing but harm to the cause of liberty," Burtsev said didactically. "No wonder Pestel himself in 1817 rejected Lunin's plan for seizing Alexander on his way to Tsarskoye Selo. The Secret Society has nothing to offer in place of the old established form of government. The best we can do is to improve that government. Without it, the horrors of a second Pugachov affair are inescapable...."

"But do not forget this is not the year 1817! Regicide then was premature, but today it is high time we got down to real business," Yakushkin interrupted him somewhat irritably. "The Tsar's answer to the Semyonovsky men's just demands has been the rod! Wait till he comes back from the congress, where his innate despotism has been reinforced by Metternich's counsels! The Arakcheyev regime will let itself go with a vengeance, whilst we—"

"That's why we're convening the congress in Moscow," Burtsev said quickly. "We'll come to some arrangement there."

He stepped close up to Yakushkin and went on in the solemn tone of a member of the majority vested with power: "Nevertheless, we do not wish to force anybody. We do not want to shed blood. All we want is to influence. To change bad things for better little by little. Our friends—Ilya Dolgoruky and Mikhail Muravyov—believe that we should be guided merely by those rules which unite men in the practice of virtue, and nothing more. And we must widely recruit new members, so as to convert the greatest number of citizens to enlightened ideas."

Yakushkin laughed.

"We shall not go far with that German sentimentality under our Russian conditions. You do not need a change of government for that."

"Yes, but we consider our nobility to be the only pillar of the state," Burtsev said importantly. "We want an enlightened government. On the one hand, we are the guardians of our chartered liberties, on the other, we are the defenders of those liberties against the rabble. Not long ago in St. Petersburg Pestel expounded his ideas about the advantages of the republican system over the monarchy with such eloquence and conviction that everyone present voted for the republic, but no sooner did Pestel leave than the majority bethought themselves and decided that they did not want such a government at all, let alone fight for it. I believe that our Society must first of all dissociate itself from Pestel!"

Yakushkin felt a sudden aversion for Burtsev, who stood revealed to him as a petty man with a narrow view of the cause of which he spoke. And although Yakushkin was not under Pestel's "spell," he was too shrewd and fair-minded a man not to appreciate the latter's superiority over the irascible Burtsev.

"Still, I don't think you are right to work yourself up against Pestel the way you are doing instead of seeking unity," he said with displeasure. "You can't flay the same ox twice. Pestel is no more perfect than any of us, but the mere fact that he has no interest in life outside the cause of liberty commands respect. He has brought to this cause his broad intellect and will power. And that, if nothing else, gives him the right to first place in the Secret Society. Each of us, without sacrificing his own convictions, ought to try to accept one of Pestel's fundamental ideas—that only unity of all will make for real strength."

"If it were only a question of uniting men of different views there would be no argument," Burtsev retorted with a vicious doggedness that disfigured his amiable features. "I am not the only one who suspects Pestel of wanting to dominate the membership for his own ends—"

"Our concern should be not with Pestel's presumptive feelings," Yakushkin broke in weightily, "but with his clearly expressed proposals. Here they are: 'The aim of the revolution should be a *republic*. The sole means of attaining it—an *armed rising*.' Our congress must frame its own views just as clearly. In my opinion, personal irritation can only cloud the issue and is out of place here."

"I quite agree with you," Burtsev said in a pained tone. "And for that very reason we ask you, Ivan Dmitrievich, as the Moscow representative, not to invite Pestel to the Moscow congress. Besides, he has no relatives in Moscow and no business that requires his presence there. The Tsar, you know—so I heard the other day—spoke of him as being a dangerous *Carbonaro*."

"I have only a letter to General Orlov with a personal invitation," Yakushkin said drily, although Burtsev's request suited him, as it fell in with the wishes of the members at headquarters. "Do you know whether Orlov is in Kishinyov?"

"He was to have left for Kamenka. On our part we shall elect such men for Moscow as represent the will of the majority and not their own arbitrary will," Burtsev said pointedly, having already made up his mind to go himself.

"Just as you please," Yakushkin said wearily. "You are a separate branch of the League and have the right to make your own choice. I am merely authorized to notify you about the congress in Moscow to be held in January. Oh, by the way," he suddenly added, reminding himself of his last conversation with Osip Karpenko,

"can you tell me what kind of man Gorbachevsky is? Isn't he a member of the Tulchin Branch? He lives in Novograd-Volynsky and serves in the artillery."

"If rumours are to be believed, they have started something of their own down there. Something ultra-provincial, no doubt," Burtsev said in a slighting tone.

He suggested to Yakushkin a stroll through the town, but Yakushkin retired to his room on the plea that he felt tired after his journey. He wanted to be alone.

Burtsev had mentioned the name of Lunin during their conversation. Yakushkin found himself dwelling with pleasure on the image of that brave, extraordinary man.

Lunin had begun his service as a cadet in the Cavalier Garde Regiment, and was promoted to the rank of officer for military valour at Austerlitz. Having taken part in all the wars against Napoleon, he had suddenly hit upon the idea of doing away at a single stroke with the man whose ambition it was to conquer the whole world. One day he asked the Commander-in-Chief to appoint him parlementaire to Napoleon, intending to stab him when they met. The plan had had to be abandoned as the regiment moved off. "He would certainly have killed Napoleon if they had sent him," Yakushkin thought with a smile.

He dozed off, but suddenly awoke from a horrible dream. His meeting with the fugitive colonist and the latter's story about the Arakcheyev floggings, when all that remained of the victim's body were bloody chunks that had to be carried out on a tarpaulin sheet, must have sunk deep into his soul. The scene rose vividly before him: the squirming body, with twisted arms tied to the butt of a rifle, dragged forward by soldiers down the dreadful files of a thousand men with long swishing rods. Behind the doomed man followed another soldier, prodding him on with his bayonet.

Yakushkin drank some water, lit a candle and moved over to an arm-chair. He was breathing hard, his heart

beat fast and his taut nerves cried out for relaxation. But imagination ran away with him.

He suddenly remembered himself a Second-Lieutenant of seventeen next to the gilded royal carriage. The corpulent figure of the Queen Mother, Maria Feodorovna, could be seen through the lowered glass, sitting back in the cushioned seat. She was holding a dainty lace handkerchief in her plump gloved hand, ready to wipe away the tears of tender emotion at her meeting with her victorious emperor son. But where had that been?

The glittering ceremonial vestments of the clergy, the solemn prayers and deafening hallelujahs, and close by, the ferocious faces of the police, mercilessly beating the common people who were eager to obtain a closer view of their soldier heroes. Towering above the crowd—the triumphal arch at the entrance to Peterhof, surmounted by six alabaster horses in honour of the six regiments of the First Division. It was a ceremonial meeting of the troops home from their campaigns.

The stout Dowager Empress was waiting for Alexander to salute her by lowering his sword before her in accordance with the rules of court etiquette.

Alexander, the handsome young Captain of the Guards on a golden stallion, unsheathed his sword with a flourish. As luck would have it, just at that solemn moment some bewildered peasant took it into his head to dash across the open space in front of the Emperor's horse. For some reason of his own he was in a hurry to get to the other side. Throwing etiquette to the winds, Alexander clapped spurs to his golden steed in a sudden fit of rage, and dashed after the fellow, his features convulsed. The man was seized by the police.

People still loved the Tsar and would fain forget that he was the son of the hateful Paul, and here at this first meeting he had so rudely awakened them. . . .

Second-Lieutenant Tolstoi, standing next to Yakush-

kin, had whispered: "Reminds you of the fairy tale where the wicked cat turns herself into a princess, but forgets herself at the sight of a mouse and pounces on it."

Looking back at that first ceremonial meeting Yakushkin thought how grimly symbolic it was. Alexander could no longer disguise his autocratic, crafty nature under a mask of liberalism.

"In any case," thought Yakushkin, "the Tsar's personality is now of small account. The task facing the members of the Secret Society is to find a way not only of removing the autocrat but of tearing up the autocracy itself by the roots."

CHAPTER THREE

The vast estate of old Raevskaya covered a thousand dessiatins in the Chigirin Uyezd of the Kiev Gubernia. A niece of His Serenity Prince Potyomkin, she inherited so many estates out of his immense fortune in different gubernias that Lev Davidov, her second husband, improved the occasion to make her an amusing surprise gift on her birthday. Out of the initial letters of her various estates he composed a boastful inscription on a transparency illumined from within, reading:

"LEV LOVES EKATERINA!"

By counting the illuminated letters envious guests could reckon up the number of estates, not to mention farmsteads and other appendages, which their hostess possessed.

The huge manor house, with its palatial halls having windows in two tiers, its mezzanines, outbuildings and verandahs, stood in a lovely park with flower-beds and conservatories.

Ekaterina Raevskaya had a son by her first husband—Nikolai Raevsky, the famous hero of the Patriotic War. By her second husband she had two sons, Davidovs. The eldest, Alexander, a retired Colonel and once a handsome man, took after his grandfather Potyomkin in portliness and bearing, but there the resemblance ended. Having settled on his mother's rich estate he grew fat, flabby and lazy in a Falstaffian way. The only point on which, in Pushkin's opinion, he differed from that Shakespearean character was that he had married the charming Comtesse de Gramont, for which the poet had acclaimed him "the stately cuckold."

That frivolous beauty Aglaya thought nothing about taking unto herself a variety of comforters, who cheered the drooping heart of this martyr of matrimony.

Apart from Raevskaya's children and grandchildren, who were frequent visitors, Shura, the butler's pretty daughter, lived in the house as a permanent member of the family. She had been taken in to be educated as a fully privileged daughter, but lest the girl should forget herself and her benefactor's charity, the old lady had made one condition: when her father, the butler, served her at the table together with the others, she was to get up and kiss his hand before helping herself.

They kept open house at Kamenka, where things were run in grand style, with an orchestra and a choir of their own. On gala days cannon were let off and there was a display of fireworks that remained long in the memory of the local villagers.

It was to this manorial estate that the members of the Secret Society flocked on St. Catherine's Day.

Madame Raevskaya's second son by Davidov—Vasili—was an ardent adherent of the Prosperity League. He was expecting two other members of the Society—General Orlov and his adjutant Okhotnikov—to arrive that day. Vasili Davidov had come down to Kamenka a few days

before with the twenty-year-old poet Alexander Pushkin, already celebrated for his *Ruslan and Ludmilla* and still more for his "seditious" verses against the government, copies of which circulated secretly throughout the country.

Ekaterina Raevskaya, in a white head-dress of Valenciennes lace, a satin gown and the Potyomkin family jewels, was sitting enthroned in a large easy chair in her blue sitting-room. She was happy to have her children and grandchildren around her on her birthday.

Her eldest son, Nikolai Raevsky, had come with his first-born Alexander, but the old lady would have preferred the company of her youngest grandson, the amiable and open-hearted Nikolai. She did not know what to make of Alexander, who had a malicious streak in his character which had repelled her ever since he was a child.

"Mind you, he has no hump or anything like that showing, but his soul is kind of crook-backed," she would say of him. "He's such a kill-joy. Ah well, please God he will improve!"

But Alexander never did improve in the sense his grandmother prayed for. In contrast to his handsome sisters and Herculean brother Nikolai, he definitely showed up to disadvantage. He had a small snake-like head on a tall skinny body and his swarthy face was lined with premature wrinkles. He had thin sneering lips and yellowish-brown eyes, like a merlin, which snapped viciously from behind the lenses of his spectacles. The General, as usual, complained to his mother about his first-born.

"Alexander shows no feelings at all! You'd think he had none—just a multiplication table in his mind and heart. He doesn't believe in love or anything—and that at his age, at twenty-five!"

"I see he's brought that Circassian boy back with him from the Caucasus," the old lady said, tearing herself

away from a game of patience. "He seems to be fond of him."

"He was fond of his dog Attila, too, and abandoned it without turning a hair. He doesn't even remember where he left it. Living creatures are playthings to him, he loves them so long as they eat out of his hand. But just try to disagree with him—you'll only get coarse and malicious abuse for your pains instead of an argument. I can't understand why our amiable Pushkin is so wrapped up in him. He listens to his hissings with open mouth."

"Pushkin?" The old lady put her cards down and her mouth hardened. "Is that the young man Basil has brought down with him? I hear he has Negro blood on his mother's side."

"He has the head of a genius and the heart of a Galahad," the General said warmly. "He is the most honoured of our guests, Mother."

"I don't mind him staying, all guests are welcome," the old lady said with a bob of her lace-capped head, and dismissed her son with a wave of a small patience card, giving him to understand that "Diana in the Grotto" had eluded her and the game claimed all her attention if she was to win it.

"I have no time for conversation, my dear."

She did not finish the fashionable patience, however. Boisterous cries arose in the mirrored hall, which was lit up as if for a ball by numerous sconces. The old lady was about to send her ward out to discover the cause of this merriment, when her favourite grand-daughter Adèle, the young daughter of the charmer Aglaya and Alexander Davidov, burst into the room like a hurricane.

"Granny!" cried Adèle, lowering herself at the old lady's feet so swiftly that her muslin dress billowed cloud-like over her head. "Oh, Granny! If you only knew who has come! General Orlov—he is ever so handsome

and sweet—and his adjutant, and another gentleman in civilian clothes named Yakushkin.”

Smiling at her pretty grand-daughter, who was so like herself at the same age, the old lady murmured: “There are no Kushkins in our family or set that I can remember.”

“Ya-kush-kin!” Adèle said with a peal of laughter.

Alexander Pushkin, who had come running in after the girl, stopped in the doorway, admiring her dark little head with the pale-blue bows set in an agitated sea of muslin flounces.

“Well, what are you looking at? Come and help Granny!” Adèle cried, nodding at the old lady, who was struggling to get out of her easy chair.

Pushkin extricated Mme. Raevskaya from the heap of embroidered cushions with such gallant adroitness that the old lady rewarded him with a gracious smile, remembered all she knew about the Pushkins, and said benignly, as though granting him permission to live:

“I know you—son of that lovely Creole and nephew of Vasili Lvovich the poet—to be sure I do. Well, well, that’s splendid!”

Leaving the old lady to the care of her companions, who came hurrying up, Pushkin and Adèle dashed out into the garden like roistering children.

The garden was autumnally severe. Although not frozen, the water in the pond looked slack and heavy, as if settling down for the winter. The cheerful ripple which, in summer, had seemed to live a life of its own, dancing in the sunshine and tempting one to get into a boat and sail down its merry track, now had a leaden glint.

“Catch me if you can!” Adèle whispered, and ran up the path to the top of a high artificial grotto. Pushkin flew up after her and sat down on a moss-grown boulder. Adèle climbed still higher, broke off a twig, and touch-

ing Pushkin's hair with it, suddenly began speaking in that curiously feminine, wheedling tone which her mother Aglaya used when opening her attack upon some fresh victim—a voice, upon hearing which, the ladies shrugged their shoulders deprecatingly and the gentlemen chuckled.

“Now confess, who is more beautiful—I or Mamma?” Adèle said, toying with the twig.

Pushkin glanced at her quickly with reproach, took the twig from her, broke it and threw it away.

“How rude you are!” Adèle cried angrily and ran down the hill. Seeing that she was not being pursued, she shouted this time in quite a naughty voice: “I shall never forgive you, not even if you go down on your knees and beg me!”

“I have no intention of begging forgiveness,” Pushkin said unconcernedly and did not stir from his seat. He recollected the cynical advice one of his friends had given him: “Stop falling in love, my dear chap! Those females only understand you when you cheapen yourself as a poet. In the neat you are beyond them.”

Of course, Adèle was not Maria Raevskaya—however could he imagine them together! Adèle was simply the daughter of her frivolous mother. And for Maria the poet had no need to cheapen himself.

Once more the sweet, almost forgotten image of Maria Raevskaya wove itself into all his thoughts. Those verses of ineffable tenderness which she was to call to life sang in his heart like a haunting melody.

He sat on the boulder for a long time, but the verses still eluded him. Something was still lacking for their complete birth. But the poet knew that this exquisite emotion would come again and again until he had mastered it and embodied it in words.

Pushkin climbed down and went deep into the park. He sought quiet and solitude, so that he could think undisturbed.

Yes, it was not here, but in some far-off place of exile he would have been had not Karamzin and Zhukovsky intervened on his behalf with the Tsar when his *Ode to Liberty* reached the palace. He wondered what the Tsar's face looked like when he read:

*O shame! O horror of our days!
Like fiends, came the Janizaries!*

Those lines would rankle, for although Alexander had not committed the murder himself, persistent rumours were current that he had secretly plotted against his father, the Emperor Paul.

Pushkin had gone out to his place of banishment in the South in a resentful mood. Luckily, he had fallen into the kind hands of Ivan Inzov, a rare chief, who combined two excellent qualities—wit and kindness. Inzov had treated the banished poet as he would his son, and had not burdened him with official duties. Pushkin had been free to suck at his pipe all day if he chose, or write poetry. Inzov had raised no objections to his going away with Raevsky to take a cure.

He had needed a cure, too. Even now, as he walked down the shady avenues of the park, which were touched with the damp of autumn, Pushkin's shoulders twitched at the recollection of the dreadful shivering fits, alternating with high fever and ghastly nightmares, that had harassed him. "That's what comes of bathing in the Dniester in an evil hour—gone and got the shivers," his faithful servant Nikita had grumbled.

The unexpected appearance in his wretched little room in Ekaterinoslav of the bushy-browed ruddy Nikolai Raevsky, youngest son of the General, was like a sunbeam that rends the black clouds and restores life to the dead-looking field. The Raevskys, who were going South, had taken him with them and treated him as if he were one of the family. Apparently his illness had

been a lingering one. The journey had seemed unreal, like a happy dream after a recent nightmare. Had he really been riding in that coach with Nikolai through the vast open spaces of Russia, while in front, stopping now and then to inquire solicitously about his guest's health, had ridden Nikolai's father, the hero General of the Patriotic War, with his daughters, one of whom bore the incomparable name of Maria. He could have ridden on like that without end.

In Novocherkassk, however, he had been rudely awakened from his day-dream.

The party had stopped at Ataman Denisov's house, where they had learned of the government's savage reprisals against the peasant uprisings. Real skirmishes were being fought with the armed peasants on the Don and in fifty estates of the local gentry. The Raevskys' old coachman had commented on the fact in a tone of approval: "The muzhiks are giving their chiefs a beating—they want to be free! Good luck to 'em. . . ."

And then that other amazing example of this irresistible yearning for freedom! Two men had escaped from the Ekaterinoslav prison in a most extraordinary way. Chained together, they had swum the river and run away. One had to love freedom as strongly as that!

And how lovable old Raevsky was. The villagers and townsfolk had greeted the hero of the Patriotic War with genuine sincerity during the progress of his journey, and on such occasions he would whisper teasingly to the poet: "Come on, read them your *Ode to Liberty*."

The old man, not wishing to give up his family name, had proudly rejected the title of Count which the Sovereign offered him. A genuine feeling of filial affection for this man, a total stranger to him, grew ever stronger in Pushkin.

Second impressions of people and scenes lost none of their vividness for Pushkin, who had the happy knack of

reliving things with the zest of first acquaintance. He had ridden farther and farther south with the Raevskys. On the outskirts of Stavropol there was a wide stretch of open country where fancy riding was held on public holidays. The place was then deserted. Standing alone in illimitable space, Pushkin had suddenly obtained a glimpse of snow-capped Elbrus on the horizon. He had experienced a tingle of exalted feeling, as if he had spied upon one of the mysteries of Nature. That infinite height and virgin whiteness had shaken him to the depths of his soul. Curiously, that impression had helped him to assert his right to see the world in its all-pervading grandeur and counterpoise its inner beauty to the impact of such a keen and merciless mind as Raevsky's eldest son Alexander possessed. He and Pushkin had held very significant conversations on the banks of the Podkumok, where they had spent long evenings.

Pushkin recalled Gurzuf, where the whole large family of the Raevskys had already foregathered. The General's wife—a grand-daughter of Lomonosov—arrived with her daughters. The poet derived a pleasure in uttering their names aloud—Ekaterina, Elena, Sophia, Maria.

Maria. . . . A pang of remorse shot through his heart again. How could he ever think of replacing that image, which, he now knew, was enshrined in his heart for ever.

As for her brother, his friend Alexander Raevsky, an indefinable change had come about in their relations, and a vague resentment against the man was growing in him. Alexander's caustic irony, which he had taken for the sign of an independent character, had appealed to him at first. However, the son's character lost much by comparison with his father, who was richly endowed in heart as well as in mind, and gradually showed itself to be cast in a commoner mould.

"Is that you, Pushkin?" the voice of the man he had just been thinking of hailed him. "Come here,

quick, while it's still light. I'll show you the family relics!"

Alexander Raevsky slipped his arm through Pushkin's and said laughing: "All alone? And I thought you were with Aglaya or Adèle—I was afraid to call you."

"There's neither the mother nor the daughter," Pushkin answered gloomily.

"No wonder you look so glum! Let us go to the Hall of Fame, my dear fellow. I always spend the night there in the summer—not a single gnat there. It's rather coldish for sleeping in now, but the relics have not been put away for the winter yet. You can have another good look at them tomorrow by daylight."

The Hall of Fame was a circular colonnaded pavilion—a fantasia in the classic style—which the landed gentry were so fond of adorning their estates with. The two men ascended the steps and entered a small picture gallery.

"Here, on the right, you have the relics of the Lomonosov clan, mother's family," said Raevsky, leading Pushkin up to a bust of his illustrious ancestor. "Here are the nets which the young genius was supposed to have caught the Kholmogori fish with. Not the identical nets, of course, but at any rate they come from there.

"And here, on the left, we have the triumphs of the Raevskys, first and foremost Papa's heroic deed sung by Zhukovsky. The General, like an ancient Roman, leads his sons—that is, Nikolai and me—to their death for the sake of their country. Feast your eyes on this patriotic daub—it's one of Grandma's favourites. There it is, under glass in a gold frame. When the cold weather starts this treasure is carried indoors and hung up in the reception-room beside a genuine Teniers. The brother of the brush dabbed some green paint on the lads' ears while he was doing the greatcoats, but that's nothing."

"The famous battle at the village of Saltanovka," Pushkin said gravely, going up to the cheap picture. "That was when the General with ten thousand men held up Berthier's corps of forty thousand strong, wasn't it?"

"Yes, and received a gold sword. Take a closer look at it."

A young General, quite unlike Raevsky, was dragging two boys by the hand towards the French troops. The inscription said: "Forward, men! I and my children, whom I am sacrificing, are leading the way for you!"

"D'you remember Zhukovsky's lines?" Alexander said, and recited:

*Raevsky, glory of our day,
Great soldier! More than once
He was the first to join the fray
With his courageous sons.*

"Yes, the old lady is proud of her son and grandsons, as you can well imagine," he laughed. "Father, together with his scions, has been raised to the dignity of a Roman."

"At any rate, your father took the lead in a crisis, as usual," Pushkin said severely.

"No one doubts it. But Father never acted so naïvely and extravagantly in any of life's emergencies."

"I find this picture touching rather than amusing," Pushkin said with growing annoyance. "The details may be imaginary, but substantially they are true. You have here an expression of national feeling, the glorification of a Russian soldier hero. And that is what your father really is."

Raevsky smiled ironically, shrugged his shoulders and pulled out his watch.

"You have half an hour more to roam about and dream. Grandmother is annoyed when anyone is late for dinner."

It's a birthday dinner today, you know. When you've had your stroll come onto the verandah. I am going to have a talk there with General Orlov."

* * *

Mikhail Orlov, recently promoted to the rank of General, was sitting in a deep arm-chair on the spacious verandah, which was thickly draped in wild vine. The leaves were an autumnal carnival of colour—a brilliant crimson and gold in some places, still green in others.

Orlov gazed pensively at the rocky banks of the river with the winter crops glimmering bluishly beyond it and the still more distant woods. "What a pity that engaging Nikolai is not the eldest of the Raevsky brothers instead of that dry-as-dust Alexander!" he was thinking. He was at a loss for words to broach with Alexander such an intimate subject as his love for his sister Ekaterina and his intention of proposing to her. Alexander, no doubt, was perfectly well aware what Orlov wanted to speak to him about, yet he made no attempt to give him an opening.

A stork came out in front of the verandah. It had not flown south with its flock, owing to an injured wing which had not healed yet. It stood there on one leg in a kind of lopsided despair, its long red bill turned skywards, and uttered a mournful stuttering cry.

"What an apt name they have for storks in this part of the country—*leleka*,*" said Orlov. "Probably from the sound it makes."

Orlov had a fine face, frank and benevolent, with arched, delicately pencilled eyebrows. In powerful physique and proud bearing he resembled his father and uncles, the famous favourites of Catherine's reign, for which Pushkin had dubbed him "the grand noble of

* *Leleka*—imitative of a stuttering sound:—*Ed.*

Grandma's days." A shy smile, oddly out of place on that proud countenance, betrayed his agitation.

"Yes, the leleka stork," Raevsky muttered without removing his pipe. "That name does aptly describe the sound which this musician sees fit to charm our ears with."

He shooed the bird away with a swift wave of his pipe, then swung his lean body round towards Orlov and fixed him with an eye that had an ugly glint in it.

"By the way, Mikhail Fyodorovich," he said significantly, "I haven't congratulated you yet on your receiving the Sixteenth Infantry Division. If I remember rightly, you were refused it for five years, despite all your services in battle and what not?"

"Yes," Orlov said, smiling. "The Tsar couldn't forgive me that report about the abolition of serfdom I submitted to him, nor the one with the names of the Generals that I kept from him. Together with me those Generals had protested against Russian territories being alienated to Poland...."

"Don't you think it odd," Raevsky interrupted with an absent air, "that Captain Yakushkin, an utter stranger, should suddenly come down here on Grandmother's birthday? It was quite out of his way, come to think of it. I'm inclined to think that that gentleman holds extreme liberal views. Has not my dear uncle, Vasili Lvovich, planned a political gathering in Kamenka under cover of the holy martyr St. Catherine? What do you say?"

"It was I who enticed Yakushkin here," Orlov said hastily, waiving the last question. "We met on the road, and he was such pleasant company that I insisted upon his coming here with me, bearing in mind how hospitable your relatives always were."

"Yes, of course, guests are always made welcome here, especially by the Duchess Aglaya. She will start practising her charms on him, but I'm afraid they'll be wasted.

This Yakushkin is said to be a gallant knight, devoted to a single lady—the knight of the rueful countenance, I fear, since his lady-love has married another. They say he has buried himself in the country, given himself up to the charms of rustic life and good works for the muzhiks.”

“It would grieve me to think that Yakushkin is obnoxious to you. . .” Orlov began.

“On the contrary, I find him most agreeable,” Raevsky interrupted negligently. “He is a clever man, calm and courageous. I said that about the political gathering because some people in St. Petersburg dropped a hint to me that there would be uninvited guests at Kamenka on November 24th, Grandmother’s name-day, supposedly by arrangement. The host, my uncle Vasili Lvovich, retires to the mezzanine with those guests and they sit there all night arguing, drinking nothing, and exciting the curiosity of the servants and the domestic staff. Whatever you may say, dear General, this Yakushkin of yours is no casual visitor. And it wasn’t for ‘company’s’ sake you brought him down, although you are going to launch a campaign against the bigwigs of despotism. Excuse the bad pun.”* Raevsky broke into a harsh laugh. “But I beg to be excused! You won’t drag me into any secret company for love or money. I can’t stand these home-made revolutions!”

“But sometimes they lead to coups d’état,” Orlov answered gravely. “Take for example the revolution in Spain, the convening of the Cortes, the events in Italy, Naples—”

“All affairs of the moment,” Raevsky interrupted. “I am convinced that both those Ferdinands, the First and the Seventh, will return to their thrones. But what

* In Russian the words *company* and *campaign* are pronounced alike.—*Ed.*

affair of ours are Spanish affairs? Ugh, another bad pun—it's become a disease with me! Seriously, though—here at home, for all the outrages of the Arakcheyev regime, there are lots of people besides myself who do not want any changes. They do not believe in their beneficial effects. Men are so mean, so greedy, and despicable, that in whatever improved forms you place them, the so-called sum total of evil remains the same. Then why make all this fuss? Even presuming that such a utopia as the levelling of property becomes a fact, I am sure that people will immediately start creating new stimuli towards envy and enmity. They will devise all kinds of ways to produce further levelling. For instance, talents, mind, beauty, longevity. Scoundrels, I am sure, will invent ways of robbing each other of all natural advantages, hitherto considered inalienable, innate."

"We shall find ways of keeping those scoundrels of yours within bounds! They'll be gripped in a vice," Orlov said quietly, looking at Raevsky's vicious face in astonishment. His genial, healthy nature revolted at this skinny, vindictive man, who reminded him of a sinister spider. "To be so ill-disposed towards people, to care so little for their good! It's either a malady or a crime," Orlov concluded angrily.

"But if I don't even love myself?" Raevsky retorted defiantly. "Why the deuce should I love people I don't know? And future ones at that! The trouble is that no one can make out an intelligible case for the men of today sacrificing their all for the benefit of those of the future. If the 'Golden Age' ever does come, I won't be there to see it, you may be sure of that."

Orlov got up disgusted.

"If you think you are voicing some sort of demonic philosophy, you are mistaken," he said. "In thought it is sheer immaturity, in feeling—bestial malice. However, knowing your habit of mind, I am sure you had some

reason for speaking as you did. I am curious to know what practical inferences one is to draw from your reasoning?"

Alexander Raevsky got up, too, and said with a curt bow: "The practical inference is this: if any man, no matter who, belonging to a secret society, should take it into his head to woo one of my lovely sisters, I shall use all my influence in the family to demand that he be given what we here in the Ukraine call the *harbooz*."

He laughed and explained affably: "A *harbooz*—in Russian just pumpkin—is a quaint symbol of rejection. It is sent to the suitor's home as a silent message. And now it is time we went in to dinner—I see Pushkin looking for me." He indicated Pushkin who was ascending the verandah steps. "You are punctual!" Raevsky shouted to him, and lowering his voice, said to Orlov in a bland confidential tone: "Either the *harbooz* or a friendly offer to stop being a member of the Secret Society. That's that, my friend. . . ."

Left alone, Orlov walked agitatedly up and down the verandah. "I could throw myself into the affairs of the Society, and abandon all thoughts of love and happiness—get this *harbooz*, as he calls it. What shall I do?"

A prey to unsettled doubts, Orlov followed Pushkin and Raevsky into the house.

CHAPTER FOUR

Captain Konstantin Okhotnikov, Orlov's adjutant, reclined on the broad comfortable ottoman in Vasili Davidov's study.

He had slipped away from the guests in his usual quiet fashion and mounted the steep little staircase to his favourite soft-carpeted room. There was an old fire-place here with a cast-iron fender, and many good pictures.

The large windows commanded a view of the distant woods; the walls were lined with glassed bookcases. There were books here to suit the tastes of all Davidov's friends, from the ancient philosophers to modern almanacs. There was a good selection of books on philosophy and political economy to meet the needs of "special" visitors, who, enjoying the hospitality of Kamenka for long periods, were glad to find close at hand some book that they wanted or a favourite author.

Captain Okhotnikov, a former Lubni Hussar who had fought in the war against Napoleon, had been a prominent member of the Secret Society since 1818. He was a highly educated man, and what his friends called his "terrific erudition" impressed everyone.

"So that's where you are, Konstantin? I thought so," Yakushkin said in an affectionate tone, coming into the room. He sat down on the ottoman beside his friend and glanced at the book he was reading. "You harbour no grudge against Titus Livius, I see," he said with a smile. "He played you a shabby trick, Livy did—d'you remember how your friends used to 'rag' you about him at school?"

"So they did," Okhotnikov said with a faint smile.

The telltale flush that lit up his pale cheeks, and the feverish sparkle in his eyes foretold his early doom. Okhotnikov was a victim of malignant consumption, and everyone, himself included, knew it. He had the courage to seek relief from his mental and bodily sufferings in day-dreams, and this kept the iron from entering his soul. Possessing a lively imagination, he let himself be carried away by Plutarch, and lived through the adversities and triumphs of the ancient heroes as if they were his own.

This faculty of becoming utterly absorbed in a book had given his friends cause for amusement, as in the case of that worthy historian Livy.

Pushkin, who was fond of Okhotnikov, once noticed that he had gone woolgathering among his ancients. He and a friend, with artful intent, had come upon him suddenly demanding that he should settle an argument of theirs. Okhotnikov, who strongly believed in the magic of classical oratory, had retorted with a quotation from Livy's address to the Roman senators. Raising his eyes, he had started off with a French translation of the well-known oration *Patres Conscripti*.

His recitation was cut short by the hearty laughter of his friends. Set on foot by Pushkin, the nickname *Père Conscrit* stuck to Okhotnikov for the rest of his life.

However, Pushkin was fond of carrying on long and earnest conversations with that man, who was as familiar with the Russian natural philosopher Vellansky as he was with the fashionable Schelling. Another of Okhotnikov's endearing qualities was his good nature. He was kind-hearted in a solid, dependable way, without being sentimental. He received a generous allowance from his father, but lived only on his pay and gave the rest away to the poor of Kishinyov. Once, being out of money and having pressing need to help a messmate who had been in the French campaigns with him, he had without hesitation sold a diamond ring, a gift from the King of Prussia, and made his friend a present of a house with a vineyard.

"If you do a thing, do it properly," Okhotnikov had explained with a shy smile, as if apologizing.

Vasili Davidov, the host, came in. He was a man slightly under thirty, and quite unlike his corpulent brother. He had a shrewd vivacious face with drooping Ukrainian moustaches.

"Put your wits to work, gentlemen," Vasili Davidov said worriedly. "We must help Orlov out of his trouble. I just met him in the park—he looks very gloomy. That satanic nephew of mine, Alexander, has upset him. What

a shabby trick fate has played on poor Ekaterina, giving her that fellow for her eldest brother! Orlov was going to propose to her, you know. Alexander Raevsky, who is a dire enemy of secret societies, suspects him of belonging to one of them. He has good reason, too, for it was but recently that Yushnevsky and Pestel admitted him to the Tulchin Branch. Raevsky, of course, will try to prevent the match and set his mother and father against Orlov. We shall have to make believe that no society ever existed, and act the comedy at once."

"Your proposal suits us perfectly," Yakushkin said, livening up. "We shall simply have a dress rehearsal of what we are going to deal with at the coming congress in Moscow."

"Let us go over all the pros and cons and kill two birds with one stone," Okhotnikov said, laughing. "While doing the business we have come here to do, we shall prove for the benefit of outsiders that under present conditions in Russia the thing is impracticable."

"We shall have to take in his father, too, the old General, while we are at it," Yakushkin said, smiling. "He was rather curious to know what secret errand had brought me here. He's a capital fellow, Nikolai Nikolayevich, but he has many prejudices to get rid of. You can ridicule the government or even the Tsar—by all means, but you dare not raise a hand against the tyranny of the autocracy—that he won't have."

"And there's another man we have to assure that no secret society exists—that is Pushkin," Okhotnikov said. "He is so hot-headed. What's more, he is supposed to be in exile, and the police no doubt are keeping an eye on him."

"Yes, we have to be particularly cautious just now," Yakushkin said, and told his friends how the Tsar had even been suspicious of him and other Smolensk land-owners and called them conspirators for having donated

large sums for the relief of the famine-stricken peasants in the Roslavl Uyezd.

"We got it from one of the courtiers. The Tsar said to him: 'This is the work of some secret society. You have no idea how strong they are, my dear fellow. They can destroy anyone they like.' If only he were right!"

They all laughed.

"And do you know who did most to raise this royal incubus?" Okhotnikov asked, and answered the question himself: "Alexander Pushkin. Yes, the youngest of us, and not even a member of the Society."

"Quite right, Konstantin. He is only twenty one, but, my God, the way he described serfdom in his poem *The Village* is simply magnificent! We ought to take a lesson from him how to brand the greatest of evils with the shortest of mighty words:

*Ferocious feudals here, unruled by law or feeling,
Have seized with the rapacious force of whips
The time, the property, the labour of the ploughman.*

"He put the whole thing in a nutshell," Vasili Davidov murmured with profound admiration. "And under what conditions! In the midst of such events at home! Anakcheyev dragooning people with the rod, and the Russian Tsar with his craft and hypocrisy betraying at the congresses the very liberties he had formerly upheld. When all is said and done the Holy Alliance is just another name for arch-despotism."

Okhotnikov jumped up from the ottoman with sparkling eyes and flushed face and recited with deep feeling a verse of Pushkin's which everyone now knew by heart:

*'Tis only where almighty laws
Are made to further Freedom's cause,
That tears by suff'ring subjects shed
Fall not upon the monarch's head.*

"I remember Jean Pushchin telling me," Davidov said after a slight pause evoked by the stirring lines, "that Pushkin had long suspected his friend of belonging to a secret society and had kept on at him to tell his secret and invite him down there. Nikolai Turgenev told me that after a reading of Ulibishev's political utopia *The Dream* at 'The Green Lamp,'* Pushkin had begged him earnestly to tell him who had inspired the author with such revolutionary ideas. And not long ago both Turgenev and Jean—that dear fellow who is so fond of Pushkin—begged me that we should not take it into our heads here to enrol him in the Secret Society. Pushkin will rush on destruction and get us all into trouble without meaning to do so. But these considerations apart, our first duty is to take care of his wonderful genius," Davidov concluded in a tone of paternal affection.

"The more so that it is now such a precious asset to the cause of liberty!" Okhotnikov exclaimed earnestly.

It was arranged that Davidov was to go at once in search of Orlov and let him into the friendly plot, and later invite all the other men up to his room for coffee and liqueur.

Yakushkin, left alone with Okhotnikov, showed a keen interest in Orlov's activities in Kiev, where his free-thinking had made quite a stir.

"Let me tell you for one thing: Orlov is convinced that we are on the eve of what he calls 'a universal débâcle' and that we must hurry up and prepare at least the young generation for the new order if we ourselves are not destined to see the dawn of the new day," Okhotnikov said, repeating Orlov's speech almost word for word. Once on the subject of Orlov, he could not stop himself. "I am so glad that he has received a division

* "*The Green Lamp*"—a literary and political society of critically-minded young nobles (March 1819-summer 1820). It was a secret branch of the Decembrists' Prosperity League.—*Ed.*

at last. He will have plenty of scope now. True, he contrived very cleverly to preach free-thinking ideas even at the humble post he held in Kiev."

"You mean the mutual instruction schools, of course?" Yakushkin said, following his friend with interest. "To be sure, we've heard that Orlov, starting with forty youngsters, has multiplied their number this year to a thousand eight hundred. And won praise for it even from the *Invalid*. It was worded so pompously that I remember it by heart," he said with a smile and quoted the journal's semi-official tribute to Orlov's school: "'To see it and not admire it would be two entirely incompatible ideas.'"

"They were too stupid to understand what they were praising!" Okhotnikov laughed. "Those Orlov schools spell death to the obscurantists if they only knew it; they are a powder magazine. Young men are being sent to him from all over, and when they have finished their course of instruction they will go back and in their turn set up similar hotbeds of revolutionary protest at home. Unfortunately for the government all these hearths of education are being kindled at the single flame of our free-thinking ideas."

"And Orlov's speech at the Kiev Biblical Society? Do you know, Konstantin, it has been circulated in hundreds of copies all over the country. And wherever people think, Orlov is called the 'Light amongst the youth.'"

"He deserves it!" Okhotnikov concurred warmly. "He is a great man of mature intellect, wholeheartedly interested in his country's good. Do you remember the end of his speech about those who crowd about the throne and rule the country by deceit: 'They have stolen all the gifts of heaven and earth, all the privileges, leaving the people only toil and patience. Out of this false and evil doctrine all the tyrannical forms of government have

sprung.' How do you like that? No wonder Prince Vyazemsky, for all his sang-froid, is delighted with Orlov and goes trumpeting all over Moscow: 'What an orator! You've set a wolf to guard the sheep!'"

"He will get him into trouble," Yakushkin said with concern. "I fear Orlov's growing popularity will do him no good. I can hardly imagine the Tsar forgiving his former favourite for sneezing at the royal favour. He is simply afraid of Orlov—it was all Kiselyov and Witgenstein could do to persuade the Tsar to give him this Sixteenth Division at Kishinyov."

"And even so they have driven him out to a remote outpost, as far away from the centre as possible," Okhotnikov remarked. "But he can give a good account of himself here, too."

"I'm so glad you helped me to persuade Orlov to come to our January congress," Yakushkin said, gripping Okhotnikov's hot hand. "That man is an important acquisition."

There was a sound of footfalls, the pleasant jingle of spurs and hum of voices on the stairs.

Vasili Davidov brought his guests up. Motioning General Raevsky and Pushkin to adjacent arm-chairs, he said with a smile: "The oldest guest and the youngest side by side, if you please!"

"I wouldn't mind having you for a son," the General said jokingly, then added: "But with the father's privilege of the birch."

"At your hands? I wouldn't mind at all," Pushkin answered gaily, "were it not so late in the day."

When the guests were seated, boy-servants handed round lighted pipes, set out a variety of bottles and wine-glasses on the tables and disappeared.

Vasili Davidov rose with an air of dignity, as though conscious of the weight of his former Colonel's epaulets upon his shoulders, and addressed the company:

"Gentlemen, the events of the past year have been so remarkable that we would fain discuss them here together. Undoubtedly, the most important event in the capital—the well-known 'Semyonovsky incident' in the Tsar's favourite regiment—will have serious consequences. The more so that the Emperor heard of the incident at the congress not, unfortunately, from a Russian courier, but from the hostile lips of Metternich. Upon the Tsar's return we may expect a drastic change of policy in the spirit of reaction at the dictates of the Austrian prime minister."

"But why did the Tsar learn of the 'Semyonovsky incident' from Metternich?" Pushkin broke in. Davidov's first words had found him listening with quickened interest. He had not even touched his glass for fear of missing a word.

"Because," Alexander Raevsky answered him with faint mockery, "your philosophic friend Pyotr Chaadayev, whom Vasilchikov entrusted with the fateful report, set out in a luxurious but leisurely carriage, and made the journey in such easy stages, what with attending to his nails, his coffee and his shaving, that he was late. And that crafty Metternich made the most of it to curry favour with Europe, much to the Tsar's annoyance. I doubt not but this delay on M. Chaadayev's part will be avenged on the Semyonovsky men's backs."

"The men's backs will always pay, no matter who reports to the Tsar," Pushkin flared up.

General Raevsky hastened to relieve the tension.

"Are you starting a revolution here, gentlemen?" he said. "I'm afraid this is no place for me then."

"We and the revolution are things far apart," Yakushkin said. "We are merely at the first stage of its discussion, and Your Excellency's political wisdom is our best ally. That, if nothing else, will keep us away from conspiracy and Sand's dagger."

"If I am a guarantee that things will not come to daggers, then I do not mind presiding here," the General said with a smile.

"In that case, Father, let me hand you the insignia of office," Alexander Raevsky said, giving him an old silver bell from off a shelf.

"Joking apart, I beg to take the floor," Okhotnikov said excitedly, going out into the middle of the room as if he needed space for a running jump.

"Before we start summing up, as we have gathered here to do, I would remind this assembly of a circumstance which no Russian should forget. Poland, as you know, has been granted a constitution. But what has Russia received in reward for her heroism of 1812? For her incredible sacrifices? For the valour of the whole Russian nation? All that Russia has received from her Tsar is military colonies."

Okhotnikov got this out in one breath for fear of being interrupted. He resumed more calmly and with a touch of sadness:

"The Tsar has emancipated the peasants of the Baltic gubernias, and it was he who said these highly significant words to the Livonian nobility: 'The well-being of nations can be founded only upon the principles of liberty.' And he confirmed the statement by graciously granting the peasants their freedom without a patch of land. I think it is high time that we took the fight for real liberty into our own hands," he concluded fervently.

Alexander Raevsky glanced at his father with sly curiosity. The glance was not lost upon the General. He rang his bell to silence the hum of approval and said suavely:

"Since I have been asked to act as chairman and since the young gentlemen are so much quicker than us old men in grasping the details of the revolutions that have followed one after the other from Spain to Naples,

I should like to hear those latest details from their own mouths. As for our own dear country, its affairs are only too well known to us."

"Father has steered his ship clear of the first reef," Alexander Raevsky whispered to his neighbour.

"But the events in Greece concern us closely," Yakushkin said.

"Perhaps you will tell us about Greece, then, Ivan Dmitrievich," Alexander Raevsky suggested.

"Yes, Greece!" came voices from the ottoman where Vasil Davidov was trying to soothe Okhotnikov, who was all eagerness to take the floor again.

"Yes, about Greece, and the whole truth!" Pushkin cried.

"The truth it shall be," Yakushkin said unhurriedly. "As you all know, the Tsar has shown such an interest in Greece since 1815 that all the powers are greatly concerned about it. Favours have been showered on the Phanariote princes, and old Ypsilanti escaped to Russia. . . ."

"Where he died," the General interposed, "while his sons Alexander and Demetrios are now the Tsar's adjutants. The Tsar's favourite minister Count Capo d'Istria is a Greek, too. But pardon me, go on. What next?"

"Next comes this," Yakushkin said in a grim tone, as if he were pronouncing a verdict. "The Tsar allows some Greek or other, the founder of the Hetaeria, living in Odessa, to give orders to his associates in Greece. He receives a petition from the Suliotes in which they call him their dear father, and he graciously approves of them. Now the question arises,"—Yakushkin's large grey eyes travelled round the company,—“have the Greek leaders any grounds for believing that the Tsar, their dear father, will help them in case of a rebellion? But we know that after the Aachen Congress, ever since he fell under the influence of Metternich—"

"Why blame his counsellors!" Okhotnikov shouted. "Our Tsar has simply shown himself at last in his true colours and revealed the cloven hoof."

"He no longer incites the Greeks to fight for their liberation, and just tells them coquettishly to have patience," Alexander Raevsky put in.

The General glared at his son, exasperated at the latter's habit of adding fuel to the flame.

"Please, no interruptions! Go on, Yakushkin," he said.

"The cruel consequence of this ignoble game with the Greeks has become evident these last few days, when the Hetaeria offered Alexander Ypsilanti the military command. Confident of the assistance of the Russians, he is dashing back and forth between Kiev and Odessa in expectation of the 'father's' substantial support. Meanwhile time is passing. But for the false promises of the Tsar he would be moving on the Peloponnesos, where the tribes would join him—"

"They will! And we have plenty of our own volunteers who are willing to fight for Greek independence!" Pushkin shouted.

The General rang the bell and said amiably: "The near future will settle our relations with the Greeks. Who will report to us on Spanish affairs?"

"Wonders are being worked in Spain, not affairs," Orlov began in his smooth calm voice, and Pushkin, reminding himself of Orlov's "Arzamas"* nickname, whispered softly: "Our 'Rhine' has started to flow."

"Until recently only a handful of educated men dreamt of restoring Spain her constitution of 1812, but the people, ignorant and Jesuit-ridden, have accepted the return of Ferdinand without demur, and he has made his entry into Madrid as sovereign monarch, declaring the Cortes invalid."

* "Arzamas"—name of a literary circle (1815-1818).—*Ed.*

Okhotnikov escaped from the custody of Vasili Davydov and cried out:

"And a government of madmen has been formed in Spain! The king's chief minister, Antonio Ugorte, is a rogue, a former errand-boy. Another is a drunken water-carrier, and the third member of this worthy *camarilla* is the Russian ambassador, the nefarious Tatishchev. As a result of popular discontent—a military plot. That's a curious fact, gentlemen, which you will notice everywhere—"

The General rose and rang the bell, drowning the rest of Okhotnikov's speech. But all had caught his drift and applauded.

General Raevsky put the bell back on the shelf and said with an air of mock tragedy: "I wash my hands of this! I pass the reins of government over to the young General," he added, pointing at Orlov.

Orlov discarded the humorous tone set by old Raevsky and continued the discussion gravely:

"I have little to add to that sinister picture of reaction, with the triumph of the inquisition and the clique of rogues surrounding the king, which Okhotnikov has so faithfully described. But, as I have already said, events in that country are truly amazing. On the first of January this year Rafael del Riego, a young officer, together with Colonel Quiroga and supported by a small military party, proclaimed the constitution. On a fine day of the vernal equinox Ferdinand VII took the oath of allegiance to it. All Spaniards followed the king's example, nay more—the clergy blessed the Spanish constitution from the pulpit. You may rest assured that under the threat of the bayonet they hastened to discover divine motives in favour of the new government which only yesterday they had cursed."

"Excuse me, Mikhail Fyodorovich," Alexander Raevsky remarked sardonically, "but you have forgotten to men-

tion that the idyll among the rioters—sorry, I mean the revolutionaries—was short-lived. The leaders started to squabble among themselves. The old story of thieves falling out over the booty!”

“But you are begging the question too, Alexander Nikolayevich,” Orlov continued without losing his equanimity. “Don Riego may have been removed by the ministers, but someone bigger than the ministers has risen in his defence—the people. Riego is greeted in the streets with acclamation. The revolutionary *Tragala* is sung in his honour. And last but not least, the people in Madrid have broken into the palace and forced Ferdinand to renew his oath of loyalty.”

Pushkin went up to Orlov impulsively, and making no attempt to conceal his emotion, said: “Formerly peoples rose one against the other, now kings are warring with the people. It is not difficult to guess what side will get the upper hand. No wonder the Russian Tsar now of all times has proposed to the powers at the congress in Troppau that immediate action should be taken against all the revolutions.”

Vasili Davidov, obviously wishing to smooth things over, hastened to declare: “I have fresh documents from St. Petersburg concerning the ‘Semyonovsky incident.’ Would you care to hear them?”

He drew a folded sheet of paper out of his wallet.

“These are important extracts from Adjutant-General Benkendorf’s message to Pyotr Volkonsky. They will give you a clear idea of the prevailing temper among the Guards. This one to begin with—about the Preobrazhensky men: ‘If they actually had to fight their comrades they would refuse.’ ”

“There you have the passive beginning of the revolution,” Pushkin interposed quickly. “It is for us to take action.”

"Don't interrupt, my dear friend," Vasili Davidov checked him. "We shall draw conclusions afterwards. Just now let us hear the voice of the people and the opinions of its military leaders. 'We should not deceive ourselves,' writes Governor-General Vasilchikov. 'The troops are performing their duty, but any ill-feeling that might have provoked them to fight their comrades was lacking. The military and civil authorities of St. Petersburg were very much afraid of this, for if any of the officers had taken the lead during the incident and told the men to take up arms, everything would have gone to the devil!'"

"Well then, take up arms since the General himself advises it," Alexander Raevsky said with a smile. "That's a most interesting document," he drawled.

Davidov went on reading:

"... moreover, witnesses saw, heard and recorded for posterity the following: the Grenadier Guards on sentry duty at the fortress, where the Semyonovsky men were confined, shouted: 'Today it is Schwarz's turn, tomorrow it will be Stürler's!' The men of the Moscow Regiment, meeting the Semyonovsky men on their way to the fortress, embraced them and said aloud: 'If the Tsar does not pardon you when he comes back, all the Guards will rise up and side with you.' General Bistrom tried to persuade the Pavlovsky Regiment to tell the Tsar that Schwarz was a kind commander when he asked them about him. Their reply was short and pithy: 'We cannot say that, because everyone knows Schwarz to be a tyrant.' As for the Preobrazhensky Regiment—" Davidov's voice had in it a ring of solemn satisfaction—" 'the leading regiment, which sets an example to the whole army—this is what the men say: 'The Cossacks are guarding us now, but what our chiefs do not know is that the Pavlovsky Regiment, the Grenadiers and Chasseurs are wavering, and the Cuirassiers, too, will not be

found wanting.” The latest news I have learned from these documents,” Davidov went on, “is that the Tsar has commanded Vasilchikov to discover the names of these ‘babblers.’ And as a means of effecting this discovery we have this curious piece of royal advice: ‘Find out through the wenches and hospitable women.’”

“Hospitable women? What a mincing term for loose women! But that is what you would expect of such a ladies’ man as the Tsar,” Alexander Raevsky said ironically.

“And what are we expected to do?” Pushkin said with flashing eyes.

“Set up a secret society against the government, which, it would appear, acknowledges its own impotence,” Alexander said, subtly masking the directness of his challenge. “It follows naturally from what has been said here, there is no other alternative!”

“Well then, such a society already exists,” Yakushkin said solemnly, going up to Alexander Raevsky. “And if that is the case, will you join us?”

Yakushkin’s face, grown tense and peaked, made him look like a wary bird.

Alexander Raevsky, a faint smile snaking on his curling lips, drawled: “I will.”

The General refused to take any of these speeches seriously. He went up to his eldest son and said, smiling: “I gave up the chair, and this is what happens! Thanks to your jokes I would be well out of this.”

He stopped and glanced anxiously at Pushkin.

Pushkin was beside himself. Consumed by an inner flame, his face had noticeably paled. He raised his hand with an involuntary gesture as though about to utter a solemn oath. Then suddenly he winced and shrank as if he had received a blow, and sank into the nearest chair.

Yakushkin burst out laughing. Okhotnikov and Davidov joined in. Alexander Davidov, “the majestic cuck-

old," who was dozing in a Voltaire arm-chair after a rich dinner, awoke with an audible sigh.

"Gentlemen," Yakushkin said in a firm voice, "there is no secret society in Russia whatever, and to my mind there never can be. We should have to rid ourselves first of our damnable laziness, our differences of opinion and political immaturity. The example of the soldier's unanimity made me attempt this joke, which your artful hoax"—with a slight bow in the direction of Alexander Raevsky—"prevented me from playing to the end."

"Then it was all a joke!" Pushkin exclaimed. His eyes filled with tears. Obviously he was under stress of great emotion.

"I was never so unhappy," he added bitterly. "I saw my life ennobled and a lofty aim before me. And all this was merely a cruel joke!"

"How magnificent he is just now," Yakushkin whispered to Okhotnikov, watching the play of emotion on the poet's face. He went close up to Pushkin, and murmured with deep feeling and respect: "Whether there is a secret society or not that should not worry you. You have your own great mission. No speech about liberty could strike a deeper and more stirring chord than your poetry has done. All Russia knows your verses by heart and reveres them."

CHAPTER FIVE

Pestel's rooms, thanks to the care of his devoted orderly Savchenko, were extraordinarily tidy and clean. Good taste was evident in the choice and arrangement of the mahogany furniture, in the prints in dark frames, the flowers, the excellent piano, and the bright but not gaudy hangings embroidered in the Eastern style over the doors and windows. No ladies visited Pestel; his

only relaxation in a life filled with military duties and the affairs of the Secret Society was music. He was fond of improvising at the piano in the twilight. Pestel was a good musician, but he held this gift to be an exclusive attribute of his private life, and so few of his friends knew of his musical talent. He made an exception in the case of Vasili Ivashov, Captain of the Cavalier Garde Regiment, who was now adjutant to Witgenstein and lived in Tulchin.

Ivashov had received a good education. He could draw excellently, he read a good deal, knew foreign languages to perfection and had studied music with the famous Field, who considered him one of his best pupils. This, combined with a mild disposition, accounted for the attachment which the austere Pestel formed for his young companion, who preferred art to good-fellowship.

In the evenings they played duets, and over the tea Ivashov readily related stories about his beloved Undorovo—his mother's estate in the Simbirsk Gubernia, where he had so recently been living in the bosom of his happy family.

Pestel, however, did not like to speak about his family. He was aware of the general prejudice against his father, Ivan Pestel, the Governor-General of Siberia. Although the criticism of Pestel Senior was for the most part unfair, and that of taking bribes, for instance, quite unfounded, his son suffered no little from these rumours.

All the more agreeable to him was the society of this easy-tempered and musical Ivashov, who shared his rooms. He relieved the burden of his private life, as it were, and Pestel, with an eagerness that was rather unusual in him, confided his thoughts to Ivashov, who was also a member of the Prosperity League.

Now too, holding in his hand copies of the sensational leaflets that had been found scattered in the courtyard of the Preobrazhensky barracks and whose contents few

people really knew, Pestel said to Ivashov: "Here, Vasili, read that. It has been copied out for me."

Ivashov read the leaflet and looked up at Pestel with blue wondering eyes.

"But this was after the 'Semyonovsky incident.' It shows how strong the discontent is among the soldiers! It contains some very clever ideas, but awfully foolish ones, too: the soldiers are convinced that the old Empress, out of sympathy with the Semyonovsky men, has sent them four thousand rubles in the fortress. Fiddlesticks! What a shame, they still place all their hopes on the dynasty. The benevolent Tsar will come and see justice done. By flogging, most likely!"

Pestel walked up and down the room with a light noiseless tread that was somewhat at variance with his thick-set figure.

"Yes, Vasili," he said, "it's something to set you thinking. This stupid belief that the Tsar is a father and protector, and all men's troubles are due to his ministers, should be plucked up by the roots."

"How true that is, Pavel Ivanovich!" Ivashov exclaimed. "As a matter of fact none of the soldiers believe that those hateful colonies were invented by the Anointed. Even that faithful hound, Arakcheyev, was against them, and only the fear of the Tsar finding some other brute for the job, who would dig his grave, too, while he was at it, induced Arakcheyev to take the matter into his own iron claws."

Pestel went over to the window and stared out with dark brooding eyes. The hard set of his somewhat fleshy lips, and his drawn brows betrayed a state of profound abstraction.

Ivashov took a music book off the piano, but did not put it on the stand, and stood looking at Pestel, thinking how that too vivid colouring—the blue-black hair and thick side-whiskers—made his face look like a mask. It

lacked the warm tints that would have appealed to him as an artist, and was white with a girlish milkiness.

"A penny for your thoughts, Pavel Ivanovich?" said Ivashov. "They must be sad."

"They are, Vasili. I was thinking that we could not do without the so-called *cohorte perdue*, the Forlorn Hope. In other words, men who will volunteer to kill the Tsar, and by so doing, seal their own doom. In any case," he added meditatively, "we are all doomed, only perhaps to a slower death in the freezing wilds of Siberia. That is, of course, in the event of failure. But we may succeed, may we not, Vasili?"

Ivashov flinched. He knew that he did not have it in him to be one of the Forlorn Hope, and in order to conceal from Pestel the involuntary dismay his words had evoked, he hastened to bring the conversation back to the leaflets.

"But what if the revolt starts among the troops themselves, Pavel Ivanovich? Mind you, this is more than an appeal, it is a programme for a military rising," he said, pointing to the leaflet. "It even proposes electing the commanders from among the rank and file!"

"That is nonsense, of course," Pestel said in a low angry voice, "nonsense. The troops themselves are only capable of senseless rioting, but not of making a revolution. How are the masses to retain the power they will have seized? They must be directed by a single organized will."

Pestel crossed to the piano, where Ivashov still stood motionless with the music in his hands, and sat down on the high round stool.

"Let us assume that the Preobrazhensky men succeed in winning over the whole Guards," he began again. "What next? Where are their plans, their leaders, their aims and ideas, when the very people who believe in the elective principle at the same time have implicit faith in

the Tsar's protection and love? No, Vasili, what we need is at least ten years of iron dictatorship in their own interests, and not until then can there be any question of the elective principle.

"Only touchy sucklings," he said bitterly, getting up, "only silly enviers can suspect me of craving for power for my own sake when I insist on the necessity of a dictatorship."

Ivashov gripped Pestel's hand and said with engaging sincerity: "Pavel Ivanovich, I am confident that you are disinterested. I know it."

"Thank you, Vasili." Pestel detained Ivashov's hand in his for a moment, but hating all demonstrations of affection, he immediately jostled Ivashov towards the door with jocular severity and said in his usual peremptory tone: "Run along now and find out when the members are holding the meeting to give us a report about their Moscow visit. Komarov and Burtsev have been back since yesterday, I believe. Bring all our friends here with you."

Ivashov went away. Twilight had fallen. Pestel began to light the candles without waiting for his orderly to do it. He liked a brilliant light in his room. On his writing-table stood two heavy candlesticks of Peter the First's period. The plinth was a broad truncated pyramid, from the centre of which rose a twisted copper column, like one of the pillars of Solomon's Temple. Candles stood in pairs on each branch of this column. Over the writing-table hung a handsome bronze bracket. Pestel lighted all the candles and sat down to read the two leaflets over again.

The second leaflet, too, had been found among the Preobrazhensky men somewhat later. Both were so expressive of the soldiers' longing for reform in the army leadership that Pestel was almost certain their author was a soldier himself. There were no few literate men in the

army from among the manorial serfs. What was to prevent a wilful lord of the manor from giving his serf an education, and then, on the spur of an angry moment, packing him off into the army. Such soldiers were particularly sensitive to the cudgel and other wrongs, and would be the first reliable support when the hour struck. But perhaps the author of those first leaflets, which had so alarmed the secret societies as well as the authorities, was a seminarist? Each line breathed such hatred towards the nobility! One thing was certain—those leaflets had not been written with the help of any members of the Secret Society, who were too passive for such inflammatory stuff.

Pestel lighted the piano candles, took the music which Ivashov had left—a Nocturne by Field—and sat down to practise his part.

Pestel was twenty-seven. He was born in June 1793. He had taken private lessons up to the age of twelve under the exclusive control of his mother, a woman of remarkable gifts, who was especially fond of him, her first-born. He had continued his education in Dresden together with his brother Vladimir.

In Dresden he had taken a thorough course of secondary school training, and astonished his teachers by his aptitude. He finished the Corps of Pages with distinction and had his name inscribed in gold letters on the marble roll of honour.

Pestel began a brilliant military career. His first distinction—a gold sword for bravery—was won at Borodino where he was badly wounded in the leg. He accompanied Count Witgenstein to Mitau in the capacity of adjutant. The Count, speaking of his subordinate's estimable qualities as if they derived from him, was wont to say: "Pestel is good at everything—put him in command of an army or make him a minister—he'll always be the right man in the right place."

In 1818 Pestel was attached to Kiselyov, Chief of Staff of the Second Army. And finally, now, he was on the point of receiving command of a regiment.

Pestel waited for news concerning the results of the Moscow congress of the Prosperity League with some agitation. He had been a member of that society and one of its founders when it had borne a different name—the Salvation League. And it was he, Pestel, who had written the League's charter. It was a revolutionary charter, which, on the insistence of the members of the Secret Society, who took advantage of the fact that Pestel was unable to leave Mitau, was superseded by an ineffectual but extremely loyal charter.

"I wonder what those Moscow politicians, who prevented my coming, have contrived this time?" Pestel thought, placing his hands on the keyboard.

The deep restful chords gradually restored his equanimity and he began to improvise. He was even glad that Ivashov was not there, as musical improvisation was one of the secrets of his private life.

A pallor overspread his features. His large head with its wide brow was slightly thrown back. His black hair, usually lank and stiff, lay in soft waves. That look of deep concentration, which indicated the workings of a powerful mind, was gone from his face. At the moment he was just a young colonel, relaxing to the music he so passionately loved.

There was a knock at the door—the prearranged signal. Pestel got up immediately and shouted: "Come in!"

It was his orderly Savchenko, a thick-set man with a cunning face, which at that moment looked worried.

"What is the matter, Savchenko?"

"I beg your pardon, Pavel Ivanovich, but it's urgent," said Savchenko. "I'd never bother you when you're at the piano if it wasn't."

Savchenko was a model of discretion and tact, who, despite his master's good-will, knew how to keep his distance; in the privacy of his rooms Pestel never discouraged intimacy.

"Captain Burtsev and Lieutenant-Colonel Komarov have got all their crowd at their lodgings, Pavel Ivanovich. Arguing and drinking—been at it ever since this morning. The Burtsev cook has run out twice to the delicatessen shop—"

"Stop chattering!" Pestel brushed him off. "I suppose we shall have to get something at the shop, too. When Burtsev comes—"

"That's just it, Pavel Ivanovich, he's not coming at all. So you needn't wait for him. That's what I was in a hurry to tell you. I just got it from Burtsev's orderly that—"

"I won't have any gossiping!" Pestel cut him short.

"It isn't gossip," Savchenko resumed, quite unabashed. "You just hear me out, Pavel Ivanovich. Captain Burtsev says to Colonel Komarov—and the orderly, of course, heard it outside the door—it's no use seeing Pestel, he says—meaning you, sir—until we club together! I'd be a poor kind of fool if I was to keep you waiting for nothing."

"Go and open the door," Pestel said, looking through the window. "I see General Yushnevsky coming."

Savchenko admitted Yushnevsky, helped him off with his things, and stood stiffly at attention like a model soldier.

"You've drilled your Savchenko well," Yushnevsky said with a smile, coming into the room. "I'm sure he's just been talking a lot of rot to you, and now he's like a speechless angel."

"I can depend on Savchenko," Pestel said. "Can you imagine it—on top of all his excellent qualities he possesses another gift. He's a walking newspaper! He has

just given me a piece of important news. Just imagine, Burtsev and Komarov, fresh back from Moscow, are already starting intrigues against me. But let us go into the sitting-room, the others will soon be here with Ivashov."

The sitting-room was a large chamber with a wide sofa on which Ivashov slept, and a large oval table over which swayed a chandelier, just lighted by Savchenko. Here Pestel received official visitors, and here the meetings of the members of the Secret Society were held. The heavy blue curtains were closely drawn.

"It was their intrigues that kept you away from the Moscow congress, too, Pavel Ivanovich," said Yushnevsky, settling himself in one of the arm-chairs round the oval table.

"I am not sorry," Pestel said with an ironical smile. "It's all for the best. No tongues were tied by my presence, and everything has come out freely."

"I have not been wasting my time either," said Yushnevsky, Commissary-General of the Second Army, a tall well-knit man with a shrewd face and prominent eyes. "I managed to get hold of Komarov yesterday and did some careful pumping. I can act the garrulous fool when I want to, you know—"

"Rather too well," Pestel concurred. "I hear that Yakushkin did not want to improve your acquaintance. He publicly certified you as a vulgarian, although Fonvizin recommended you to the officers as a clever man."

"A mask is a very convenient thing in our commissary business—a swindler will take me for one of his fraternity, and give himself away at once," Yushnevsky said with a laugh. "But let us get down to business. The congress in Moscow assembled only to reform the League, but the result is that it has exceeded its authority and closed it altogether. That monarchist fellow Fyodor

Glinka gave everyone a shock: came from St. Petersburg with a pack of new terrors about the police surveillance. Metternich has terrified our Tsar out of his wits with the menace of revolution, and the Tsar the Petersburg authorities. And Orlov goes and pours oil on the flame with his drastic proposals. 'To ensure success,' he says, 'we must first have funds. I propose that we set up a printing press for leaflets and appeals and a factory for forging currency notes somewhere in the forest.' And there and then he presents an ultimatum to the meeting: 'Either I have freedom of action or else I withdraw from the Prosperity League!' He mentioned that he had good backing: 'My Sixteenth Division will stand by me to a man!' Komarov says he had everyone terrified. Mind you, he really left. They lost big game there, everyone had staked on him."

"They wanted to pit him against me," Pestel murmured.

"According to Komarov," Yushnevsky resumed, "the old members of the Society dragged the meeting out in the hope of finding a way out of the dead-lock—the break with Orlov occurred at the first meeting, you know. It was no joke, demanding their consent to an immediate attempt at an armed rising!"

"Orlov's a funny fellow, too," Pestel said with a tinge of mockery. "Fancy presenting ultimatums in affairs like this, even if they were really started."

Yushnevsky became thoughtful.

"The worst of it is," he said with a sigh, "that many people voiced their suspicions about Orlov's excessive and drastic demands. They said it was just a stratagem on his part, and he was merely waiting for his ultimatum to be rejected so that he could have an excuse of making a sensational exit, leaving only a memory of his revolutionary ardour behind him." Yushnevsky smiled sadly. "That would also remove the obstacles in the way of his

marriage to Ekaterina Raevskaya. That, I hear, is the condition her brother has set."

This harsh judgement of Orlov was not to Pestel's liking and he changed the subject.

"Were there any other proposals?" he asked.

"Fonvizin proposed his plan of 'reasonable procrastination,' which quite suited everybody. Orlov left. They started to remove the 'unreliable' elements, meaning your followers and adherents, and the Society was declared non-existent."

"All the same it is amusing that our Tulchin Branch should have been represented by Burtsev and Komarov—" Pestel began.

"Its enemies and cowards," Yushnevsky inserted. "Lieutenant Taushev told me Komarov had confessed to him that in trying to 'incline' Turgenev towards the closing of the League, he had deliberately spoken about the Tulchin members as being violent Jacobins, who would be no small menace in the future, not to mention that they would cause anarchy and ruin."

"They had no right to close the Prosperity League without getting the views of all its members," Pestel said with displeasure. "And they should not have let Orlov go."

"What is your personal opinion of Orlov?" Yushnevsky asked discreetly.

"He is a statesman," Pestel said gravely. "Don't forget that we owe the very advantageous surrender of Paris to his political tact, and that is why he became the Sovereign's favourite. But he could not keep his place at court."

Pestel paused for a minute, then added with expressive emphasis: "I'm afraid that for all his brilliant endowments and character Orlov is only fit to be an enlightener, but hardly a revolutionary. He's too blunt and rides

roughshod over people's opinions without regard for the common good."

Savchenko knocked at the door, using the pre-arranged signal.

"Come in, Savchenko," Pestel cried. "Report!"

Savchenko came in, stood at attention and rattled off in a single breath: "Second-Captain of the Cavalry Prince Baryatinsky, Colonel Abramov, Lieutenant of the Quartermaster Division Kryukov the second, Lieutenant Basargin and Captain Ivashov of this house! Shall I let 'em in, sir?"

"Do, at once. And let us have tea and rum!"

"And don't forget the pipes with the best tobacco!" Yushnevsky shouted after him. "That Savchenko of yours has some excellent Turkish tobacco hidden away, I know. He keeps it for you and tries to foist a cheaper brand on to us."

The officers came in, laughing at the delay caused by the orderly's ceremony, but loading him with praises.

"It would be a good thing if all orderlies learnt to do the same," Yushnevsky said. "You have to be careful these days, you never know who may drop in."

All seated themselves round the oval table and began smoking.

"Burtsev asked me to tell you all that he is tired and unwell after his journey, and tomorrow invites us to his place to hear the decision of the Moscow congress," Ivashov said.

"We know those decisions already," Pestel said drily. "Still, those who care to can go tomorrow and hear them from Burtsev's own lips. And now let us start the conference of our own Tulchin nucleus."

Among these friends who, Pestel felt, not only followed his lead, but respected and loved him, he was a different man entirely. His speech had none of that

haughty superiority of tone or overruling pride which people who did not know him well resented.

“And so, gentlemen, we are now the only remaining representatives of Russia’s new-born Secret Society, which is resolved to give all its energies towards transforming our despotically ruled country into a state that will grant its citizens equal rights.”

Pestel began on a somewhat solemn note, and his outward composure scarcely concealed his agitation.

“Let us go over the tasks that claim our attention first and foremost.”

Pestel was silent for a minute, his eyes passing round the assembled company. They lighted on the plain face of his intimate friend Baryatinsky, the philosopher and poet, who had dedicated to him one of his poems from his book *Idle Hours at Tulchin*, then, with a glance at the excited Ivashov, who sat next to him, he resumed his speech, addressing himself as it were to these two men, the richest in lands and serfs:

“Our great cause demands that we should first of all search our own hearts in all honesty and reconsider whether we are really prepared to give up our privileges. In the first place we shall have to abolish all the social estates and deprive the landed gentry of both their serfs and their land, because—” here Pestel threw his head back—“because all our ills are due to the enslaved condition of the peasants and the great privileges of the aristocracy. These causes account for the decline in industry, the decline in the general welfare. Hence, too, the injustice and corruptibility of our courts and government officials, the insufferable burden of military service. Every epoch has its social task, which contemporaries are bound to tackle if they do not want to have lived their lives in vain. The task of our epoch”—Pestel’s voice grew stronger—“is to challenge the existence of aristoc-

racies of all and every kind, whether they be built up upon wealth or upon inherited rights."

Pestel's words were simple and his thoughts clear to the meanest intellect. His speech had no frills of eloquence, or flashes of sudden feeling, or even studied pauses calculated to accentuate one word or another. He drove his point home convincingly. Like a sculptor modelling clay, Pestel's powerful logic gave form and substance to the as yet vague aspirations of his listeners.

After Pestel's incontestable arguments in support of the only inevitable conclusion, all unanimously agreed that the new form of government was to be a republic, which alone could cure the country's ills and disorders.

CHAPTER SIX

The Greek rebellion in the Balkans was spreading. Feeling ran high also among the Greek residents in Russia. General Kiselyov ordered Pestel to leave immediately for Bessarabia, where he was to investigate on the spot and report to the Tsar. Shortly after Pestel's departure several members of the newly founded Southern Society went back on the revolutionary decisions they had adopted at the last meeting in Pestel's rooms.

One of the first to lose heart was Ivashov. Being a man of a mild and effeminate nature, pampered by an affectionate family, he could not bring himself to accept Pestel's stern programme. He told now Baryatinsky, now Yushnevsky with an air of alarm that the new Society spelt sheer disaster and the sooner they left it the better. But he did not even have the courage to suit the action to the word, and torn between conflicting emotions, he got leave and went abroad. He never thought that within a few short years he would be tried by the Supreme Criminal Court together with his comrades who had

remained true to the cause of "introducing a republican government" and would be sentenced to twenty years penal servitude merely because he had once attended a conference of the Southern Society.

It really looked as if many waverers and men of irresolute minds had fallen under the sway of Pestel's powerful will. Shrinking in the face of danger, such men, on second thought, hastened to repudiate the decisions which they had themselves adopted. Moreover, they accused Pestel of using coercion, or at best, like the easy-going Basargin, wondered how they could ever have agreed to such decisions in the first place!

General Yushnevsky and Prince Baryatinsky, both strongly devoted to Pestel, remained steadfast in their adherence to his views.

The fate of the Greek rebellion was now added to the other vital concerns of the members of the Secret Society. Indeed, all Russians were eagerly expecting their country to come out in defence of the Greeks and begin war with Turkey. Russian troops had been drawn up on the frontier and Yermolov was summoned to the Tsar at the Laibach Congress. Rumours were afloat that four corps had been assigned for the liberation of the Greeks.

The first to believe in this were the Greeks themselves. The leader of the rebellion, Alexander Ypsilanti, crossed the Prut with two hundred horsemen. In Jassy he issued an appeal to fight against the Turkish yoke. The appeal was worded unequivocally: "A great power approves of this exploit." Under these circumstances, who could doubt Yermolov's honourable mission as liberator of the Greeks?

Pushkin exclaimed impatiently:

*Why does the battle tarry so,
Why does it not set loose its furies?*

And the passionate Rileyev pleaded:

Yermolov, hasten forth to save the sons of Greece!

Indeed, so strong was the faith in Russia, who would rise in defence of that small and suffering nation, that Rileyev, young and credulous as he was, dedicated these impassioned lines to the Tsar:

*The monarch flies to do his deed,
A champion of Right and Freedom.*

But Alexander was in no hurry to do his deed. Metternich craftily represented the Greek rebellion to the Tsar as an attempt of the revolutionaries to cause a breach between Russia and Austria. Neither Austria nor England wanted Russia to interfere in Greek affairs, and so the Russian Tsar hastened to declare the Greeks mutineers.

Capo d'Istria, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, wrote Ypsilanti on the Tsar's orders: "You will receive no assistance, direct or indirect, from the Emperor, for the shameful and criminal actions of the Secret Society are undermining the foundations of the Turkish Empire. Neither you nor your brothers are any longer in Russia's service and no permission will ever be granted you to return to Russia."

It seemed to Alexander, terrified as he was by the "Semyonovsky incident," that both Russia and the rest of the world were on the verge of a revolution. Revolutionary outbreaks in Europe had been following one after the other ever since 1817.

The first shock had come from Prussia, starting with a seemingly trivial incident: the celebration of the 300th anniversary of Luther's burning of the Papal bull by German students in Wartburg. They collected all the hateful symbols of reaction—Frederick's ridiculous pig-tail, a corporal's cane and so on—on the square and

solemnly burned them in commemoration of Luther's act of defiance. The participants of the Aachen Congress magnified this prank into a revolutionary act, the more so that shortly afterwards, on March 11, the very day on which the Emperor Paul died, a student named Karl Sand killed the German writer Kotzebue, an agent of the Russian police. After that, revolution followed revolution year after year, sometimes twice a year.

In Cadiz, Rafael del Riego and his detachment rose against King Ferdinand and made a revolution in Spain, and in the summer Naples followed suit. On the very same day a month later Portugal rose in arms.

Such were the disturbances in Europe when the congress opened in Troppau and the first news of a movement in Greece arrived.

Count Capo d'Istria strained his invention to render at least indirect aid to his compatriots, and gave Metternich grounds for his none too flattering remark on Alexander: "He has lost all his allies, regards Capo d'Istria as a *Carbonaro*, and does not trust his army, his ministers, his nobility or his people. In such a position men have no one to lead."

And so Metternich himself took Alexander in the lead. The congress at Troppau was transferred to Laibach to facilitate the arrival of the King of Naples, or to enable the allied troops to be moved to his assistance.

When Pestel arrived in Kishinyov the local Greeks were still full of hope and believed in the Russian Tsar's assistance. Weltman, an old friend of Pestel's, greeted him with the exclamation: "All off for Greece!"

Weltman was a young officer of the General Staff who had come to Kishinyov to make a topographical survey. He was soon dubbed "our Kishinyov poet" because of the profusion of couplets and refrains which he composed to Moldavian dance tunes. He was somewhat taken aback by Pushkin's appearance in Kishinyov, but the latter,

with his usual magnanimity, treated Weltman kindly and acknowledged his gifts.

Weltman was a man of original character. An alert restless mind kept him continuously active, forever exercising his ingenuity. When he was not writing verses he would be found either modelling statuettes with no mean skill or inventing wickless lamps. He had an open countenance with bushy eyebrows and there was a look of perennial youthfulness in his dreamy eyes and around the corners of his mouth in which a smile always lurked. His manner was genial to all men without regard of rank, but Pestel excited in him a peculiar feeling almost akin to awe, and he hastened impetuously to confide in him his latest Kishinyov enthusiasms. These were General Orlov and the Greeks.

"Pavel Ivanovich, you can't imagine the general excitement here! The shops, the taverns and bazaars are crowded with Greeks, all selling their property for a song and buying rifles, pistols and swords in exchange. Themistocles and Leonidas are on everyone's lips."

"I remember what raptures we went into at school over those two heroes," Pestel said, smiling, "but it was all remote and forgotten history to us then. And now it has come to life again. How is Pushkin? Will he be dining at Orlov's today?"

"He will. We have all been looking forward to your coming and arranged to get together when you arrived. Vladimir Raevsky will be there, too. He's doing duty for Okhotnikov; the poor fellow is lying ill in Moscow, you know. What a clever man that Raevsky is!" Weltman added warmly. "And a capital partner to that other clever man—our young General Orlov."

"What are those two doing here? Making a revolution?" Pestel said.

"That's a secret," Weltman said, dropping his voice, "but, of course, not from you, Pavel Ivanovich. Being

sure of the support of his Sixteenth Division, where they call him 'father,' Orlov began to introduce reforms with still greater zeal when he got back from Moscow. He is no doubt in a hurry to put this business on a sound footing before his marriage, which will necessitate his going away for a month or two."

"What reforms are they?" Pestel inquired, feigning ignorance.

"It is a system that makes entirely new men out of the browbeaten soldiers. With such men you could turn everything upside down and put life straight again, I am sure. And his right-hand man in this business is Vladimir Raevsky."

"Please be more exact—what business do you mean?" Pestel said with a sly smile.

"The first thing Orlov did when he took over the division was to demand of his officers under threat of dire punishment that they put a stop to face-slapping and bullying. That's what his orders stated in black and white. I carry them about with me, you know. I think they are wonderful."

Weltman got out a bulky wallet filled, not with treasury notes, but with closely written sheets of paper. He modestly set aside a batch of his own verses and read out from one of the other papers:

"... I shall regard as a malefactor any officer who abuses his authority in order to ill-treat the soldiers. My resolution is firm. Nothing will divert me from this purpose. I will not have the soldiers ill-used. I yield this disgraceful honour to other commanders, who take more care of their own interests than of those of their country's defenders.' And more, you just listen."

Weltman, his eyes sparkling, read another passage:

"Officers may be sure that any one of them guilty of cruelty will be deprived of his commission for good and all. As for myself, I consider an honest soldier my friend

and brother.' Pavel Ivanovich, have you ever heard anyone else say such things publicly about the soldier?"

"They are good words," Pestel said, and one could not tell whether he was being ironical or really approved of Orlov. Weltman, however, was too excited and carried away by his own enthusiasm to notice such subtleties of tone.

"And what about Vladimir Raevsky? What is he doing?" Pestel went on with his catechism.

"With Orlov to lean on, Major Raevsky has developed activities in the Cadet and Lancasterian schools where Okhotnikov used to be. Just imagine what a simple and ingenious method of instruction he has invented. He teaches the boys exclusively by samples of his own writing in which he has such words as Liberty, Equality, the Constitution, Quiroga, Washington...."

"And, naturally, those words are followed by long verbal explanations?" Pestel said.

"That's just it! And those cadets who grasp things quicker are sometimes given whole sentences. Here's one for example." And Weltman quoted with an air of some mystery: "The Emperor is in no hurry to give the Russian people a constitution, and the masses are concealing their despair until the first spark.' Now, in explaining that, one can give people the straight truth about the present reign! Why, after such lessons, men are ready to go through fire and water if Orlov and Raevsky lead them. You can ask them yourself about the details of their work, Pavel Ivanovich. I suppose you will get to know things I do not know. Well, we shall be waiting for you. Don't be late."

Weltman disappeared as abruptly as he had come—he always had some urgent errands that kept him busy—and Pestel walked down to Orlov's house by a long roundabout way in order to see the town for himself in its new unexpected aspect. The population here had

increased considerably owing to an influx from Moldavia and Walachia. Many of these newcomers were distinguishable by the splendour of their dress, their magnificent well-groomed beards, and peculiar carriages drawn by many horses harnessed tandem, which haughtily outraced the local wicker carts. The coffee-houses—the favourite haunts of the Kishinyov townsfolk—were now deserted. People were drawn out of doors, under the blue spring sky, to mix with the moving crowds. Here, on the spacious square, the excited Greeks felt nearer to the sky of their native Hellas. Serbians, Rumanians and Albanians, too, joined the movement of liberation. The deep sympathy of the Russians revealed itself in the firm handshakes, questions, and exclamations of delight with which people greeted the celebrated fighters for Greek freedom. Goblets, whose appearance in the streets was a mystery, were raised in their honour and people shouted delightedly: “Here’s to the first brave step!”

Pestel walked along thinking that although Orlov had left the Prosperity League, he had not ceased his activities.

Orlov commanded Pestel’s respect, but all this educational work of his in the Lancasterian schools, however serious in intention, struck Pestel as being rather naïve. So far the Secret Society lacked both the means and the power to back the officers and soldiers who had advanced above the general low level. The way the Semyonovsky men had been dealt with was sufficient proof.

Another annoying thought ran in Pestel’s mind as he made his way to Orlov’s house: “However noble his intentions, they are of little use to the real, the common cause. Such isolated efforts cannot radically affect even the conditions of military service and will only put the government on its guard. No, his efforts are misdirected.”

With this man’s example before him, Pestel saw more

clearly than ever that he had not been mistaken in saying that everything had to be blown up. They would have to make a clean sweep of it all and set up on the new cleared ground such conditions of life in which no man could ever be a tyrant to another, no matter what his personal qualities were. And Pestel was strengthened in his resolve to work out as quickly as possible the new principles by which the Provisional Government was to be guided the moment it took the power into its hands. To complete this cherished task was a serious duty he owed to everyone.

At last his thoughts passed to Vladimir Raevsky, who was now working under Orlov in place of Okhotnikov. That admirable man with a splendid military record was a very gifted poet, devoted heart and soul to the cause of republican liberty. A man of great energy and resource, he did all he could to raise the educational level of the soldiers and improve the inhuman conditions of their life. Vladimir Raevsky had been enrolled in the Secret Society in 1818. Pestel thought of his plain but expressive face, and a smile of sympathy crossed his own at the recollection.

Vladimir Raevsky had a craning kind of look, like that of a sportsman peering out to see where his game had dropped. He had large nostrils, a soft kind mouth, and such a determined look in his keen eyes that it gave Pestel pleasure to think: "Life will not break a man like him."

Orlov, it appeared, had the best house in Kishinyov, which he had recently had done up for the reception of his future wife. The orderly reporting Colonel Pestel's arrival, Weltman ran out on the staircase to meet him. Orlov came out, too, a stately figure. He was very glad to see Pestel, and embraced him warmly.

"Come into my study," Orlov said. "Pushkin and Raevsky will be here soon, then we'll sit down to table."

The sofas and tables in Orlov's study were littered with pictures and prints. Marble copies of Venus, Hermes and other classical statues stood here and there.

"The severity of your business study has been disturbed, I see," Pestel said, smiling.

"I have bought all these things for Ekaterina Nikolayevna. They are in her taste," Orlov said shyly. "She can arrange them as she pleases."

He reddened, unable to conceal his joy: soon he would return from Kiev not alone, but with his adored wife—Ekaterina Raevskaya.

Pestel glanced at Orlov, thinking with a momentary pang that such happiness in life would probably never be his. He said hastily: "Well, how do you find it after Moscow?"

Orlov smiled knowingly.

"Just this—that certain clauses of the Green Book—the new charter of the new-born Prosperity League—dealing with the abstract virtues of charity, have, in my hands, come to serve definite aims, and what is more important, *near* aims," he said pointedly. "Raevsky and I have changed things our own way in the division. I am firm in my purpose and nothing will turn me from it."

"I do believe that nothing short of the autocratic power can make you do that, Mikhail Fyodorovich. But don't forget the Tsar is a law unto himself. He'll take away the division which he had given you so grudgingly, without having suspected, of course, that you would start making a revolution among the troops!" Pestel said, looking closely into Orlov's fine eyes. "He'll take it away, and put you away, too, while he's at it. I'd do anything to prevent that...."

Pestel's face grew cold and detached. A cursory glance told Orlov that he would say nothing more just now on

the subject that was uppermost in their minds. As though apologizing for his arbitrary activities, Orlov murmured: "At least I have put down ill-usage."

"Only in your own division," Pestel interposed. "And there again the autocracy can very easily restore what you have done away with. You remember how the Tsar threatened to pave the road to Chudovo with corpses unless the insubordination in the military colonies ceased? Your kind treatment of the soldiers is not to his liking. Think of the consequences."

But Orlov did not want to think of anything. He was swept away by his own fiery energy and delighted with the success of its application. He slipped his arm through Pestel's and said warmly: "Just think what a victory we've won, Pavel Ivanovich. Not so long ago the soldiers used to desert by the hundred, and run away across the Dniester, the frontier, anywhere. I don't blame them for wanting to run away from such a hell of a life. To think that every scoundrel has the power to maim a soldier! But as soon as I began to prosecute officers for cruelty, regardless of rank, these desertions stopped."

"Today you prosecute one scoundrel, tomorrow another will crop up in his place," Pestel said. "That does not solve the general problem."

"I will not have my hands tied!" Orlov flared up. "If we do nothing but wait for your general problem to solve itself we'll go stale before we know it! Water keeps fresh so long as it moves, but in a stagnant pond it goes putrid. If you want to know, I'll blow up that brute General Zheltukhin's Seventeenth Division for him, besides my own—I have the mines all set!"

"A great ship asks deep waters, I see," Pestel interrupted him. "If you have already chosen your path, then good luck to you—blow away," he added with a sudden gentle smile.

"Now you are talking," Orlov said, pressing his hand. "Let us go in and have dinner. They must be famished in there, waiting for us."

Pestel embraced Raevsky, too—he had not seen him for a long time and was glad to meet him. He had not met Pushkin before. They took one another in guardedly. On being introduced, they bowed to each other ceremoniously.

Pointing to Raevsky with a smile, Pushkin said to Pestel: "I am lucky with the Raevskys—my world is full of them. And now this Kishinyov one too; he is no relative of my old friends the Raevskys, just a namesake. The things I have learnt from him! Just listen to this idea he hatched as we were coming along, disputing as usual—I repeat it all the time, for I should not like to forget those words: 'Not only does man himself ripen for freedom, but freedom makes a man of him and develops his abilities.' What do you say to that? It's a school of philosophy in a nutshell."

Pushkin was obviously proud of his new Kishinyov acquaintance and thought highly of him.

Vladimir Raevsky had a natural way with him which seemed to say: "Well, that's the kind of man I am!" Only in the style of doing his hair was there something of a challenge: it lay smooth, simply parted at the side, without any of the customary twirls, and must have been annoying to his superior officers, for it gave his whole figure an unmilitary appearance, although he was a military man and had even received a gold sword for Borodino.

Pestel maintained an imperturbable and preoccupied silence, and made an unfavourable impression on Pushkin. His manner towards those about him seemed supercilious. After two or three curt remarks of Pestel's in reply to Orlov's fervent speech, Pushkin finally decided that the haughty guest despised the company he was in.

Stung to the quick, Pushkin in his impetuous way said to Pestel not without defiance in his voice: "Isn't that cruel Siberian proconsul a relative of yours?"

Orlov wagged his finger at Pushkin, but Pestel did not answer a word. He merely looked into Pushkin's eyes with a glance of such keen and pained surprise that were it put into words it would have said: "I thought better of you." The next moment Pestel had dismissed the matter, as if it were a mere slip of the tongue, and began speaking calmly to Orlov about the latter's Kishinyov affairs.

Pushkin felt abashed.

Orlov was telling them about General Sabaneyev, the commander of the corps to which his division belonged. He was no fool, but he was a cruel man and bitter enemy of all liberal reforms in the army.

"I wonder what tune that Sabaneyev will sing when I submit to him documentary proof of his officers' flagrant abuses," Orlov said to Pestel. "Raevsky here is keeping a record of them."

"And a pretty thorough one, too," remarked Raevsky.

"Yes, Mikhail Fyodorovich," said Pestel, "that naïve time when you thought you could enlighten the autocracy by edifying reports is a long way off! By the way, no one breathes a word these days about abolishing serfdom."

"I could have plenty to say about that!" Raevsky burst out. "If only I was confronted with the Tsar I'd know what to tell him! Who gave any man the right to call another 'his own,' his 'property'? By what right do the body, property, and even the soul of one man belong to another? Let him answer me what law there is allowing a man to trade, barter, gamble away, give away and tyrannize his own kind. There's only one answer—it is the result of crass ignorance, bestial instincts. 'And if that is the case,' I would say to the Tsar, 'then freedom

to all, freedom with land! And while you are at it, free the country of your presence, too. We have no use for you in Russia!"

Raevsky pushed his chair back noisily.

"Sit down, Vladimir Fedoseyevich," Orlov laughed, "no one is going to grant you that interview with the Tsar."

"We'll take it ourselves," Raevsky cried. "It's only a question of time!"

The next morning, on Pestel's invitation, Pushkin called on him at his hotel. He felt rather awkward at first, but Pestel, guessing the unfavourable impression he had made and wishing to efface it, treated Pushkin with such kindly courtesy that the latter quickly thawed and began speaking warmly and freely on the questions that interested him. On returning home he wrote in his diary: "Spent the morning with Pestel. A clever man in every sense of the word. We discussed metaphysics, politics, ethics, and so on. He is one of the most original minds I know."

One evening, in between his trips through Bessarabia, Pestel made another call on Orlov. He found the same guests in the host's study. Soon they were all speaking without constraint, calling the accursed Arakcheyev regime by all the ugly names they could think of. But when the conversation touched on the relations between the rich and the poor, Pestel held the floor alone. He spoke so clearly and convincingly that everyone accepted his ideas without argument. He expounded anew with well-reasoned logic the principles upon which his whole life and outlook were built. Untiringly and perseveringly he had thought out the exact wording of all the clauses of the Mandate, which he held to be an essential step towards resolute and armed action. This Mandate was intended for the guidance of the republican authorities

of the Provisional Government, and—until then—only for the members of the Secret Society.

Pestel's ideas concerning the further development of Russian industry and culture struck everyone as being original and novel. He boldly advocated the advantages of the factories over agriculture, which until then had been considered the country's sole traditional pursuit.

"The factories will open up a new source of wealth," Pestel said. "Agriculture, on the contrary, acts as a drag. It stands for the right of ownership, and, consequently, inequality."

He cited eloquent and convincing examples from the history of nations, showing that the age when factories flourished was a time when sciences and the arts thrived too.

Pestel's speech, the force of his conviction, evoked in his hearers an extraordinary buoyancy of spirit, rousing hopes they had scarcely dared to dream of.

"The aristocracy," Pestel concluded, "is a wall standing between the government and the people. In its own interests it conceals and always will conceal the true state of affairs within the country."

It was love for the people and hatred of despotism that united these men in Orlov's study. Each served his country in his own way, but each answered for the path he had chosen with his career and his liberty. Their aim was one—the good of the people. The feelings that actuated them sprang, too, from a single source—a noble love of their country.

And over the late convivial supper all gladly toasted the health of Pestel, which Pushkin proposed in the following words:

*Whether we keep our heads or not,
Full to the brim, I raise my cup
To Pestel's health! My heart is hot,
My blood against the Tsar is up!*

CHAPTER SEVEN

When Pestel returned to Tulchin from Bessaràbia he had so many important affairs to attend to that he hardly noticed how lonely his bachelor lodgings had become with the departure of Ivashov.

The Guards, and together with them all the prominent members of the disbanded Prosperity League, had returned to St. Petersburg from the western gubernias. It was rumoured that Trubetskoy, Nikita Muravyov, Obolensky and others had joined forces and intended to form a Northern Society after the model of the Southern.

Pestel decided that to ensure success it was necessary to unite with them as quickly as possible and go forward all together.

Before leaving for St. Petersburg, however, Pestel had to make sure of his official position and obtain a regiment at last. General Kiselyov, his chief (despite the fact that General Zakrevsky, Chief of the Inspecting Department at the General Staff, had warned him to be on his guard with Pestel), had made a personal application for Pestel to be appointed to the Vyatka Regiment. The Tsar had promised to do so, but his dislike of Pestel was so great that, when signing the ukase, Alexander had had his name crossed out of the promotion roster.

Zakrevsky had lost no time in notifying Kiselyov: "All your lists have been approved, but Pestel's name has been erased for the time being."

Kiselyov had forwarded the letter to Pestel with a note telling him not to lose heart—"you are the victim of your unlucky star"—and promising to intercede still more energetically on his behalf. Pestel had answered with his characteristic firmness of mind:

"...Zakrevsky's letter does not worry me in the least. I am quite indifferent to what may happen to me, but

then I am deeply susceptible to the slightest token of consideration and friendship; that is why the letter you were pleased to write me from Kishinyov gave me a thousand times more pleasure than all the pain caused by Zakrevsky's paper enclosed with it."

Pestel, after all, received the Vyatka Regiment, which was one of the worst and most ill-disciplined units. He was faced with the urgent task of improving discipline and making it one of the best.

Pestel was obliged to remain for a time in Tulchin where his regiment was quartered. His pent-up energy found an outlet in tireless activity, all the more that he considered it also useful for the planned rising. By making his regiment an exemplary unit he would have more chances of receiving a division.

Pestel did not stint his own money to improve the soldiers' meals, and did not spare the official career of officers who behaved unbecomingly. Harsh measures to tighten up discipline among the soldiers became the order of the day. No stone was left unturned to make a brilliant display at the forthcoming royal inspection. For this purpose Pestel selected a new corps of officers, distinguished for their smart military bearing and disciplinarian zeal.

The list of officers whom Pestel thought useful for improving discipline in the regiment and whom he had therefore earnestly requested Kiselyov to have transferred to him from other regiments, included the name of Second-Captain Maiboroda of the 34th Chasseurs.

The only reason he had asked for this captain—a man of huge stature with a mean reputation—was because he was a zealous parade officer.

Before long Kiselyov had Maiboroda transferred to Tulchin and notified Pestel about it not without a sly dig at the end of his letter, in which he wrote: "*Au revoir, Machiavelli!*"

This liberal-minded General hinted that he perfectly well understood what secret thoughts lay behind Pestel's desire to form a model regiment. Very likely he suspected even more.

After inspecting the troops, the Emperor was so pleased with Pestel's regiment that the grudging compliment was wrung from him: "Splendid! Quite like a Guards' regiment!"

Another reason for exercising strictness in the regiment was furnished by the events that took place in Kishinyov during the winter. Pestel had to lull any suspicions the authorities might have concerning the revolutionary designs of the Southern Society. And the events in Kishinyov were these: no sooner had General Orlov gone away on leave than Corps Commander Sabaneyev began a long-premeditated campaign against him in the hope of setting a trap for the General and all his confederates, that is to say, the whole "Kishinyov hotbed of infection."

The daring reforms which Orlov, supported by his officers and adored by the soldiers, had introduced in the division had long been resented by the votaries of harsh discipline and the knout, headed by General Sabaneyev, commander of the corps to which Orlov's division belonged. A wizened, malicious little man, he hated Orlov and was only waiting for an opportunity to ruin him.

"Orlov's system of administration in his division," Sabaneyev had more than once reported up, "has given rise to disorderliness and insubordination among the soldiers. Major Raevsky, Orlov's follower, is openly and brazenly implanting scandalous anti-government ideas in the schools under his charge."

Indeed, Orlov's conduct seriously alarmed the Tsar.

Soon after the Moscow congress of the Prosperity League the Tsar received a report from his agent Gri-

bovsky, who had wormed himself into the confidence of some of the Society's members, stating that Orlov had "vouched for his division" and "proposed organizing a secret print shop, which would serve as a headquarters to which all would be subordinated."

As for the "Kishinyov hotbed," Sabaneyev had a good nose. A close-knit friendly nucleus had been formed in Kishinyov consisting of Mikhail Orlov, Colonel Nepenin, Commander of the 32nd Chasseur Regiment, Major Raevsky of the same regiment, and Vladimir Okhotnikov. The authorities classed them all under a single heading—"the Orlov Affair."

An incident in the Kamchatka Regiment served as a pretext for raking up this affair. Captain Bryukhatov, Commander of the First Musketeers Company, had started to use the cane on the company's quartermaster-sergeant, a form of punishment which Orlov had strictly forbidden. Several soldiers had rushed in to take their comrade's part. It had been reported also to Orlov that Bryukhatov had defied his orders by again demanding that the provisioning allowance should be handed over to him.

Orlov had found the soldiers' complaint to be well-founded and had had Bryukhatov prosecuted.

Sabaneyev started his persecution of Orlov by having the incident in the Kamchatka Regiment reinvestigated. "Who gave Orlov the right to pardon rank and file offenders? Why didn't he report this affair to me?" And Sabaneyev instituted such a rigorous inquiry that within a short time the court-martial sentenced the mutinous soldiers to be severely punished by being whipped before the whole company. Two days after the flogging several of the men died. On Sabaneyev's command all Orlov's orders prohibiting ill-usage were burnt and the former harsh regime in the division was restored. Finally, he arrested Vladimir Raevsky, Orlov's close associate.

Sabaneyev now fully believed that he held the clue that would enable him to bring the whole Kishinyov Secret Society to light, but his plans were foiled by Raevsky's superb courage and the soldiers' deep affection for both their commanders. The men suffered the grueling interrogations without giving the desired evidence against Orlov and Raevsky.

To crown all Sabaneyev's failures, Pushkin, who, in his Kishinyov banishment occupied a room in Inzov's house, by a fortunate coincidence overheard a conversation between Inzov and Sabaneyev concerning Raevsky's arrest and warned his friend at once. Raevsky, of course, burned all incriminating papers proving his adherence to the Secret Society. Later, during the inquiry, when Raevsky's "seditious scripts" were called for as evidence of his "subversive activity in the military schools," they proved to be non-existent. Lieutenant Taushev, a member of the Southern Society, who was charged to collect evidence against Orlov and Raevsky, had found ways of destroying it. Thus, Sabaneyev's plan to kill two birds with one stone—to win favour with the Tsar and, as he boasted, to "nip the Orlov affair in the bud" by wresting a confession from Raevsky—fell through.

Although Raevsky knew that the Southern Society in Tulchin was growing in strength, he absolutely denied that any secret organizations existed in Russia.

From the fortress in Tiraspol, where he was confined, Raevsky very soon contrived to send a message "To My Friends" in verse, containing the following stirring lines:

*Go, friend, and tell Orlov from me
That I my cruel destiny
With adamantine patience bear.*

The Kishinyov incident, or, as Sabaneyev called it, "the Orlov Affair," gave a fillip to the revolutionary

ardour of many of the members of the Southern Society, but it also made them more cautious. They decided to gather only in places where they would be safe from police detection: at Kamenka, the home of the Davidovs, on Catherine's Day, and at the annual fairs in Kiev, which were held in the winter. The Southern Society was soon joined by three prominent men—Sergei Volkonsky, stationed with his brigade in Uman, Vasili Davidov and Sergei Muravyov-Apostol, an ex-Semyonovsky officer and now a Lieutenant-Colonel in the Chernigov Infantry Regiment, a man of fervid revolutionary spirit and excellent qualities of mind. Before long three regimental commanders were enrolled in the Society—Povalo-Shveikovsky of the Saratov Regiment, Artamon Muravyov of the Akhtirka Regiment, and Tiesenhausen of the Poltava Regiment.

Matvei Muravyov-Apostol, a retired Lieutenant-Colonel and brother of Sergei, being free from official duties, took upon himself to act as intermediary between the Southern Society and the Northern.

In the course of 1823 the Southern Society took final shape and fell naturally into three branches corresponding to the residence of its chief members. Pestel and Yushnevsky headed the Tulchin Branch, Davidov the Kamenka Branch, and Muravyov-Apostol the Vasilkov Branch. A year after the organization of the Southern Society the latter Branch was joined by Mikhail Bestuzhev-Ryumin, a former Semyonovsky officer and now Second-Lieutenant of the Poltava Regiment.

At first glance this tall hook-nosed officer with his ebullient vivacity created the impression of being a rather flippant young man. However, he soon revealed innate gifts as an organizer and became an important personage in the Southern Society.

Besides the principal members of the Southern Society, formerly belonging to the Prosperity League, which had

been disbanded at the congress in Moscow, there appeared in Tulchin a group of quite young adherents. Early in the twenties a circle was formed in Tulchin whose members combined daring anti-religious views with a hatred of the despotic order. They were strongly influenced by Pestel, whose views concerning the necessity of an armed rising they fully shared.

A leading figure in this circle was the youngest of the Kryukov brothers—Nikolai. He proved to be one of the staunchest members of the Southern Society. While still a youth he had chosen as his life aim the study of mankind and the ways by which it could achieve happiness. Contact with Pestel and Yushnevsky broadened his intellectual horizon. He often made trips to Tulchin from the village of Nemirov, where he had been sent for several years to make a survey.

Kryukov exercised no little influence on his comrades, and the seclusion of the place tended to draw them still closer together. At first Kryukov complained that his friends had poked fun at him and dubbed him "the Tulchin politician," but when they became familiar with Pestel's ideas and plan this attitude had changed to one of profound respect.

Baryatinsky, the poet, was another influential figure in the circle. His verses, written in French, were frequently recited in a Russian prose translation. In the circle Baryatinsky's ideas were regarded as definitely atheistic. One passage in particular excited great interest:

"When dark night unfolds its vast cloak, I read thy greatness on the brow of the stars.

"But the cry of a bird, slain by a sharp claw, suddenly repels my sinking heart from thee.

"For all thy greatness, cruel feline instinct denies thy goodness, and in doing so, thy existence.

"Let us then smash the altar he has not merited.

Either he is good but not omnipotent, or he is omnipotent but not good."

Pestel himself took little interest in the young circle. He was too busy, and more concerned with the regimental and company commanders, who, in the event of a rising, would be able to lead their soldiers after them.

Contact with the young Nemirov circle was maintained by Quartermaster-Adjutant Filippovich, General Yushnevsky and Prince Baryatinsky. The Tulchin Branch rallied considerably when this young blood was subsequently infused into it. Under the leadership of Baryatinsky they formed an active link between Lintsi, where Pestel was to have resided, and the other Branches.

The Southern Society first established contact with the Northern Society in 1822, when Pestel, himself unable to leave Tulchin, sent Volkonsky to St. Petersburg to learn what the Northerners were doing and what their plans were. Nikita Muravyov, through Volkonsky, sent Pestel his unfinished draft *Constitution*.

After studying the manuscript, Pestel sent its author his remarks through Vasili Davidov.

Pestel questioned many of the *Constitution's* clauses. He proposed that the main clauses of his own *Russkaya Pravda*, which he enclosed with his letter, be examined instead and reproached the Northern Society with inactivity, holding up the Southerners as an example of militant resolution and good organization.

"Half-measures are useless," he wrote. "Better you dropped the whole thing than did nothing and still ran risks!"

Nikita Muravyov was ill-pleased with Pestel's rebuke, and still more with his *Russkaya Pravda*. This time he put his draft *Constitution*, with slight amendments, into other hands—he sent it to Sergei Muravyov-Apostol.

In short, both Societies sought contact with each other, but each was wedded to its own opinions and insisted

on its programme being made the common platform for both the Northern and the Southern Societies. In the spring of 1823 Pestel sent his third emissary, Baryatinsky, with instructions to stir up what he considered to be the too sluggish Northerners by telling them that the South was ready for action and waiting to hear whether the North would join them. Nikita Muravyov returned an emphatic reply that they were not prepared for any action whatsoever and deemed it advisable for the time being merely to disseminate their ideas of freedom as widely as possible. "It is extremely difficult at present to enroll new members, let alone to start a rebellion!" he wrote.

One of the most obdurate of the Northerners, besides Nikita Muravyov, was Trubetskoy. Matvei Muravyov and Povalo-Shveikovsky tried in vain to reason with him, saying: "You people are just philosophizing, wasting your time in talks and disputes, whereas our Society is properly organized and has many troops at its disposal. You have neither organization nor troops. Join us! It is more reasonable for the unprepared to join the prepared than vice versa."

"Give us proofs!" Trubetskoy had demanded.

The negotiations had ended there. No one could submit to the Northerners stronger proofs in support of unity than Pestel, and so, after settling his regimental affairs, he took two months leave and decided to go north himself.

Before his departure Pestel had received bad news from home: his father had been dismissed with ignominy from his post of Governor-General of Siberia.

Ivan Pestel was born in Moscow, and had lived there for some time. In Paul's reign he had received sudden promotion and was appointed Postmaster-General. Count Rastopchin, jealous of anyone who enjoyed the Emperor's trust, devised a malicious trick to bring about the downfall of his successful rival: he wrote a letter pur-

porting to be from a nameless correspondent to a friend, telling him about a plot that was being hatched against Paul. This letter was sent through the post where it was planned to fall into the hands of the Postmaster. There was an insidious postscript: "Do not be surprised that I am sending this through the post. Our Postmaster Pestel is at one with us."

While Pestel was pondering what to do about this letter, Rastopchin forestalled him and told Paul about the trick he had played. He confessed having done it for the sole purpose of testing Pestel's loyalty and vigilance. Paul flew into a rage, and dismissed Pestel without going into the matter.

Under Alexander, however, Ivan Pestel again succeeded in rising to a high position. Knowing him to be a man of tried integrity, Alexander put him in charge of the whole of Siberia, where the most scandalous corruption and extortion were rife. On becoming Governor-General of this vast country, Pestel found himself in an extremely difficult situation. He started by throwing himself zealously into the struggle against monstrous bribery and speculation, made a host of enemies, then, horrified at his inability to do anything under the conditions in which the government had placed him, he left for St. Petersburg and continued to rule Siberia for many years from his house on the Fontanka. This circumstance gave Rastopchin cause for cracking a new joke: "What man has the best eyesight in the world? Old Pestel. Sitting in St. Petersburg he can see what is going on in Siberia."

However, experience showed that Ivan Pestel saw badly at a distance of six thousand versts. His agents, if not he, proved to be corrupt and abused their authority. And after Speransky's inspection of Siberia, Pestel was obliged to accept a humiliating resignation, in which no word was mentioned of his forty years service and irre-

proachable honesty—a quality which was very rare in those days.

Pavel Pestel recollected how a lady of his acquaintance, who had arrived from Tobolsk, had told him things about his father which proved him to be a disinterested and honest man. Perevoshchikov, a tax-farmer, whose scandalous case was being dealt with by the Senate, had sent old Pestel through a lady five hundred thousand rubles as a “gift” from a hopeful petitioner. Pestel was furious, and had had the lady ejected together with her bribe.

Pavel Pestel had just been reading his father’s letter, full of bitterness and quaint old-fashioned eloquence, in which he informed his son of his sad plight and utter ruin.

“...And now we are moving over to your mother’s estate in the Smolensk Gubernia,” the letter concluded. “I have 75 rubles in my pocket all in all, and appalling debts of two hundred thousand to worry me for the rest of my life.”

Pestel paced his room agitatedly, thinking: “That settles my scheme of life. Not for me are dreams of personal happiness, of a wife, a home.”

The handsome face of General Orlov, proud in the love of the woman he adored, rose before him. “Ah, well,” he thought, “a bachelor life will give me more freedom to fight our cause and give myself up to it wholly.”

He faced his cheerless future without flinching, and decided with the firmness characteristic of him that henceforth his father, mother, younger brother and sister were to become his constant care.

On a sudden impulse he sat down at the desk and dashed off a letter to his father.

“... You need money, and I will do my best to let you have it quickly. Another important thing is the debt. I am still serving and am a bachelor, so please do me this

great favour, my dear parents: make your debts over to me, then your creditors will not trouble you any more, and my salary will go some way towards paying them off. I think they will readily agree to this, and the day when I sign all your bills will undoubtedly be the happiest in my life, for I will know that you have been relieved of all worry on this account. Please grant me this favour. Your refusal would grieve me more than this unexpected news about your Siberian affairs. I am still under thirty and may yet succeed in life, whereas you need peace after the incessant storms that you have been living through. Let all your debts, without exception, be made over to me, dear Father, so that you and the Smolensk estate may be entirely free of this burden—such is my earnest request, and I pray that it may be granted me. . . .”

A solemn calm settled upon Pestel's soul. He felt as if he had written his dying will and disposed of all his property, which left him free and unburdened. He was not destined to continue the line, to have children and grandchildren, to grow old in peace and honour.

It was as if someone had cut his frail craft free from life's eternal moorings, and he was adrift in it alone, and now it was being swept out into the boundless sea.

His thoughts came to rest on his beloved little sister Sophia. If he were married, what wretched lot would have been hers in this society, founded on position and money!

He hastily resumed the letter: "...As regards the family estate in the Smolensk Gubernia, you must draw up a will at once, making Sophia the sole heiress of that property. We men can and should do without it, but that is impossible for the poor child. What is going to happen to that poor dear girl?"

He turned over in his mind whether he had forgotten anything, then added in his usual terse style, as though

rapping out a command: "I undertake to give my younger brother Alexander 1,500 rubles a year—that should be sufficient. Brothers Vladimir and Boris can provide for themselves."

Accustomed as he was to let his feelings be dominated by reason, he finished the letter with: "...I am more concerned about what has to be done than what has happened, however painful your retirement may be to me, dear Father. I await your news with eagerness and yearning. Your son Pavel."

"Savchenko!" he called. He rummaged about in his bureau and found the necessary currency bills, which he handed to his orderly with the letter, saying: "Please send this letter and the money off to Father at once."

"Very good, sir!" Savchenko said with respectful sympathy. He had already heard of the misfortune that had befallen Pestel's father from the other orderlies. Ivan Pestel's resignation and Speransky's appointment in his stead had been announced in the journal *Invalid* and was the subject of malicious gossip among the officers everywhere.

"Savchenko," Pestel said, somewhat embarrassed, "from today I want you to cut down my expenses, do you hear? Such things as wine, sweetmeats, you know...."

"Why, Pavel Ivanovich," the orderly said with an innocent air, "we have enough wine and all kinds of those delicacies and things to last us half a year. We've laid in a good stock."

He went off to remit the money. On his way back he dropped in at the shop of a Greek acquaintance of his and bought heaps of sweetmeats with his own money. Pestel was fond of sweets, and his orderly Savchenko had money of his own saved up.

Pestel still put off his departure. He was expecting Lieutenant Taushev any day from Kishinyov with news

about Vladimir Raevsky. At last the lieutenant arrived. He was a very young man, fair-haired, with clear, innocent eyes. Because of those innocent eyes it had never occurred to Sabaneyev to suspect Lieutenant Taushev of being responsible for the disappearance of the "seditious scripts" and other documents incriminating the "Kishinyov hotbed." Taushev told Pestel that Liprandi had returned from his business trip. He had called at Tiraspol on the way and somehow contrived to see Vladimir Raevsky for half an hour. The latter had asked him to hand over to Pushkin his poem *Bard in the Dungeon*.

"I was at Liprandi's when he gave Pushkin the poem," Taushev said. "Pushkin read it in my presence. He was deeply affected; when he had finished reading he sat down next to me on the sofa and said: 'How good it is, how stirring!' 'What do you particularly like about it?' Liprandi asked him. Pushkin read out several lines, which I memorized at once—they appealed to me strongly, too. Here they are:

*The stone-dumb people slumb'ring stay
Beneath their formidable yoke—
The flogging dynasty who slay
All thought, all murmur in the folk.*

Pushkin repeated the lines and added: 'That about the dynasty is well expressed—"the flogging dynasty who slay all thought...." I'm afraid, after such verses we shall not see our Spartan again for a long time.'"

"Our very first care," Pestel said solemnly, "will be to release Vladimir Raevsky, that excellent man, poet and revolutionary. As soon as we take the power we shall throw open the gates of his Tiraspol prison!"

Taushev further reported that during the inquiry into Raevsky's case General Kiselyov, the Chief of Staff of the Second Army, had come to see him. He told Raevsky that the Tsar had ordered his sword to be returned to him

if he would divulge what secret society existed in Russia under the name of the Prosperity League. Raevsky had answered: "I know nothing. Besides, Your Excellency's offer is so insulting that I would reveal nothing even if I knew. You are offering me my sword for betrayal."

"What a man!" Taushev added with admiration.

"Yes, Raevsky is a man in the real sense of the word," Pestel said, deeply moved. "I am sorry that my prophecy to Orlov about the failure of their common work has come true so soon. I must confess, though, that I never thought Kiselyov would lend himself to such meanness."

Indeed, it cost Pestel a great effort to maintain his outward composure when, shortly before his departure for St. Petersburg, he had occasion to meet the Chief of Staff on official business.

Kiselyov looked Pestel squarely in the eye with a twinkle of amusement, then suddenly said: "Orlov's brilliant career is ended! He has been removed from command of the Sixteenth Division. And can you imagine it—he goes up in the air and demands a trial! I doubt whether that trial will do him any good, though. I wonder, for instance, what excuse he's going to offer for deliberately putting such an impudent free-thinker as Major Raevsky in charge of training?"

Pestel said nothing, and Kiselyov, wishing him a happy journey, added his invariable: "Machiavelli!" in a tone which left one guessing whether he meant it as a compliment, an accusation or a threat.

"They may seize us at any moment," Pestel thought. "We must act promptly. And to ensure success the two Societies must unite."

It was with this all-absorbing thought that Pestel left for St. Petersburg.

CHAPTER EIGHT

On arriving in St. Petersburg Pestel put up at the Demuth Hotel on the Moika. This suited him best. He always preferred the large room here overlooking the river to his parents' big apartments on the Fontanka, which they always placed at his disposal.

He was almost immediately visited by Matvei Muravyov, who was familiar with the views and plans of all the principal members of the Northern Society.

Matvei Muravyov belonged to the large, wealthy, and gifted family of the Muravyovs. Mikhail Muravyov, brother of the founder of the Prosperity League, had withdrawn from the revolutionary movement entirely after the Moscow congress and subsequently earned among his contemporaries the nickname of "Hanger."* With grim humour he divided his family into "the hangers" and the less fortunate ones—"the hanged." Matvei Muravyov belonged to neither category. He was by inclination simply a peaceful lover of Nature and gardening. He had joined the Secret Society because of his great attachment to his brother Sergei Muravyov, who was a remarkable man and a revolutionary. Both had received an excellent education in Paris and had been brought up under the influence of their mother, one of the most distinguished women of her day. She had instilled in her sons a profound aversion for the slavery and despotic regime of their homeland.

Sergei, the younger brother, had inherited his mother's wide intellectual interests and charming good nature. Matvei had something of his father's dryness of character, and his haughty expression imparted to his slight figure a certain resemblance to a parrot with upraised

* M. N. Muravyov was Governor-General of Vilno in 1863 during the Polish uprising, which he cruelly suppressed, earning the nickname of "Hanger."—*Ed.*

beak. He did not like Pestel, but submitted to him, and at the same time took care that his brother Sergei was not drawn into the dangerous vortex.

With hands clasped behind his back, yet preserving a military bearing in his civilian frock-coat, Matvei Muravyov reported to Pestel as if he were his adjutant:

"The Northern Society is seriously alarmed at the pressure you are bringing to bear on it, Pavel Ivanovich. You sent your emissaries here three times, you know. And when they heard that you were coming yourself they called a big conference the other day and decided to have three directors instead of one."

"And who did they elect?" Pestel asked with interest.

"Who could they elect but Nikita Muravyov and the two princes—Obolensky and Trubetskoy. Nikita's wife has fallen ill and he is with her most of his time. Trubetskoy asked me to tell you that he would call on you this afternoon."

"The latest news, I hear, is that Rileyev has been enrolled?" Pestel said.

"Why, yes," Muravyov answered quickly. "Our famous poet was enrolled in the Northern Society at the same meeting that elected the new directors. And let me tell you, he is worth the three of them! He has breathed new life into everyone."

"And what do they do at their meetings?"

"Oh, they keep on discussing and comparing your *Russkaya Pravda* with Nikita Muravyov's *Constitution*. But with the possible exception of Obolensky, no one supports you, Pavel Ivanovich, because—"

"Not even Rileyev?" Pestel interrupted impatiently.

"Rileyev says that it is merely a question of vanity whose programme we accept. It is immaterial, he says, since whatever we decide will have to be submitted to the National Assembly for approval. He's a fiery soul, just boiling with energy."

"And the National Assembly—does he think it will convene itself by a wave of the wand?" Pestel said, smiling. "But never mind, I'll take them up separately."

Matvei Muravyov went away, and after dinner Pestel lay down on the couch. Like an experienced strategist before a battle, he went in his mind over all he knew about Prince Sergei Trubetskoy, for whom he was waiting with the impatience of an adversary. This evoked memories of the distant past.

Sergei Trubetskoy had his own intimate circle of friends from the Semyonovsky Regiment. He had joined the regiment as ensign-bearer at the age of eighteen. There he had met the two Muravyov-Apostols and their relative Alexander Muravyov, as well as Obolensky and Yakushkin. He had gone through the campaign of 1812 with them, had been a member of the "Three Virtues" Masonic Lodge in Paris, then of the Prosperity League. His close friends, men of the same moral fibre and intellectual interests, were bound to him by memories of old battles, and dangers and labours shared in common.

Bringing his mind to bear on Trubetskoy, Pestel recalled his brilliant service record. Trubetskoy had fought in many battles, and everywhere, as his friends testified, he had distinguished himself by his cool daring and ability to command. In the battle of Borodino he had stood up to the deadly fire of the French for fourteen hours, and at Culm, where he had commanded a battalion of the Semyonovsky Regiment, he had bayoneted the enemy out of the woods after using up all his cartridges. His valour was not a figment of men's imagination; he had proved it in battle, and was rightfully considered to be a staunch commander who knew his business perfectly. Trubetskoy, like so many others who had lived through a tremendous patriotic uplift, could not bear the same old spectacle of the serf-owning regime, the same old ignorance and tyranny which he found upon his return to Rus-

sia. He lived in the Semyonovsky barracks with Sergei Muravyov-Apostol, frequently met other relatives of the Muravyovs, and, like all the progressive youth, discussed the sad plight of his country without noticing that he was steadily breaking away from the psychology of the old circles of the nobility.

Pestel suddenly recalled his meeting with young Trubetskoy, who was plunged in gloom. He had said to him: "Everyone who has proved himself to be so indispensable in the war as you have done should serve his country in peace time with still greater success."

"Those are true words," Trubetskoy had said, livening up. "Very well, we shall do our best in peace time, too!"

And when Trubetskoy had come on behalf of the Salvation League, proposing that Pestel should write the preamble to the Society's charter, he had said with a beaming face: "Your advice is being followed, you see. We have found a way at last of serving our country in peace time."

And there their friendly relations had ended almost as soon as they had started. Pestel had written the preamble and forthwith lost Trubetskoy's confidence, acquiring instead the friendship of the highly educated Nikita Muravyov, of whom his friends said that he was worth an Academy.

In this preamble to the charter of the first secret society Pestel had, among others, propounded the idea that France might have prospered under the administration of the Committee of Public Security.

"What? Under the Terror?" Trubetskoy had said, horrified. But Nikita Muravyov had then sided with Pestel. And when Pestel, at one of the stormy meetings, had advocated a republican regime and tried in vain to bring Fyodor Glinka round to his view, it was Nikita Muravyov again who had come to his aid. And later, when Pestel had elaborated his idea and hinted at the inevi-

tability of regicide and a military dictatorship, Nikita Muravyov had been the only person who had really understood him. He had been his ally when all the others had stood appalled. And what now? How was one to account for this extraordinary change? Possibly, as Yushnevsky had said, "the man has married and lost his wings." Was not the same fate perhaps in store for Orlov? But that was impossible. On the contrary, he had lost the command of his division on account of his bold conduct. No wonder Pushkin had said to his friend: "Our 'Rhine' has married but has not changed."

Savchenko knocked at the door, using the same pre-arranged signal as in Tulchin, and announced: "Prince Trubetskoy to see you, sir."

Trubetskoy's greeting was too courteously stiff for an old comrade, and Pestel noticed it at once.

He spoke about the health of Nikita Muravyov's wife, who was now out of danger, and about Nikita being able to leave her in a few days. He was burning with impatience to see Pestel.

Pestel studied his visitor's face closely, endeavouring, as one usually does after some years absence, to trace what changes time had wrought. The familiar impression of that odd, un-Russian face was instantly revived. Although Trubetskoy's mother was a Georgian Princess, he had the type of countenance one usually associates with Asia rather than the Caucasus. Seated on a camel in a striped oriental robe instead of that elegant military uniform, he would have made an ancient nomad in the boundless steppe with that large nose in a long face, the two typical folds at the corners of his thick-lipped mouth and, despite the urbanity of a man about town, that odd gaze staring out into the unfathomable distance. It was the meditative look of a nomad. There was nothing military about the man, although he wore his immaculate uniform well and his deeds of military valour were

known to all. Nevertheless, whenever Pestel met him, it was not of his military deeds that he thought, but of the fact that the man was a passionate lover of natural history, of which he had taken a complete course of studies in Paris.

"Is it possible, Prince," Pestel said jocularly, "that we hold the same opposite views we held some years ago when you still had hopes that the Emperor would himself grant a constitution and free the serfs? If I remember rightly you insisted then that if we had the interests of the country at heart we should not go against the government but merely help it in hastening useful reforms."

Trubetskoy's eyes narrowed, sending out rays of cunning wrinkles on his face, and there was an undertone of proud doggedness in his voice when he spoke.

"Although the Salvation League has long since gone out of existence, I presume that its charter still remains the most vital thing that our country needs, that is to say, the limitation of the monarch's absolute rule."

"Is that so?" Pestel said, smiling. "Then your ideas haven't altered, but the Tsar's policy has! Yesterday it was military colonies for our country, today it is a Holy Alliance for all of Europe. Assuredly, Prince, you must be aware that when worthy men submit memoranda to the Tsar pointing out the necessity of improvements in all departments of state, his only reply is just an angry shout: Who is ruling the state, you or I?"

Trubetskoy tucked his long legs under his arm-chair, leaned forward, and without looking at Pestel, said with an effort, but in the tone of a man whose mind is definitely made up: "Under present circumstances I sincerely believe that the only useful thing we can do is to widen the circle of enlightened people as much as possible, nothing more."

Trubetskoy looked into Pestel's face with his urbane smile, and added as though addressing a lady in a draw-

ing room: "Thanks to your good offices people in high Guards' society are now reading political economy and studying Bentham."

"So they have settled the whole thing and do not wish to discuss business," Pestel thought with exasperation.

"You are to be congratulated on great achievements among the Guards!" he said in the same suave tone, which had a touch of irony in it.

It was clear to him that Nikita Muravyov, the head of the Northern Society, anticipating his intention of trying to win over each member separately, had warned everyone to be on his guard with Pestel and not to discuss important affairs with him tête-à-tête.

"At any rate, Prince, before the general meeting takes place here, can you answer me one simple question, but seriously? Is there at least unity among the members of your Society in so far as it concerns an understanding of their own aims?"

"On one point we are firmly agreed," Trubetskoy said, "and I could not express it better than Nikita Muravyov has done. These are his words: 'We cannot accept leadership based on the arbitrary will of one man. We cannot have all the privileges on one side and all the obligations on the other.'"

Trubetskoy looked up as he spoke, and a determined gleam came into his usually lacklustre eyes.

"And this is the man who commanded the troops at the Shevardino Redoubt,"* thought Pestel. "He is no coward when he knows what he is after."

But Trubetskoy had wilted. He broke off suddenly, then lowered his head and resumed with his former sullen

* *Shevardino Redoubt*—a defencework at the village of Shevardino, near Moscow, which was the key position in the battle of August 24, 1812, between the Russian troops and the Grande Armée.—Ed.

doggedness, as though trying to overcome his own irresolution:

"The power of the monarch must be restricted, but that of the people must be restricted, too. I reject dictatorship in any form, violation of the liberty of the individual by anyone whatsoever."

"That's interesting," Pestel drawled. "Pardon me, but how could you, holding such views, lead your soldiers into battle and, as everyone knows, most valorously, too?"

Trubetskoy threw his interlocutor a startled look and said quietly: "The responsibility there was not mine."

His eyes narrowed and he stared before him vacantly. It was clear that he would say nothing more of importance.

"Off he goes on his camel!" Pestel thought with annoyance. He did not detain his visitor when the latter got up to take his leave.

When he had gone Pestel, as was his wont, began to pace the large room. He crossed the parquet floor to the windows overlooking the turbid Moika, then back to the papered wall. He was thinking ruefully that he had wasted his time in coming out here, as there was little chance of reaching an understanding with the Northern Society. The political views of Nikita Muravyov, who directed the Northerners, were widely at variance with those of the Southern Society on a number of vital points.

A close study of Muravyov's unfinished *Constitution*, which had been sent to Tulchin, had shown Pestel at once that Muravyov was setting off his very moderate form of government against his, Pestel's, project for a republican state. Instead of the welded state proposed in the *Russkaya Pravda* he proposed a federal system closely allied to the ancient Russian system of independent principalities.

"Practically speaking, Nikita is the only man I shall

have to deal with seriously," Pestel thought. "He is really the only one who has formulated his ideas, and you can only dispute ideas that have taken form. Very well, we shall argue, then!"

Pestel cast up in his mind how long he could stay in St. Petersburg so as to spare a few days towards the end of his leave for visiting his father in the Smolensk Gubernia, and he sat down to write him about it. Afterwards, while waiting for Obolensky, who was to call for him to go together to Rileyev, Pestel became immersed in the reading of his *Russkaya Pravda*, from which he carefully began to make notes for his forthcoming duel with Nikita Muravyov.

Prince Eugene Obolensky, a Lieutenant of the Finland Regiment and adjutant to General Bistrom, was one of the founders of the Prosperity League and now a member of the triumvirate of directors of the Northern Society. Although he lived in St. Petersburg he always had the flavour of Moscow upon him, as it were. Anyone who had but once visited his old house, and seen him in the company of his old father, who led such a holy life that he was known by the nickname of "the secular monk," would scarcely believe that this man, so closely identified with the ancient ways of life and deeply attached to his father, could belong to a revolutionary society at the risk of his freedom and his life.

As a matter of fact Obolensky was one of the most enthusiastic of Pestel's followers. Both in heart and in mind he was predisposed towards accepting the democratic theses of the *Russkaya Pravda* and did all he could to unite the Societies.

Only that morning, when discussing with Rileyev the subject of their meeting with Pestel, Obolensky, without attempting to conceal his admiration for him, had said: "Frankly, I can't resist such a charming personality as that of Pavel Ivanovich, and it is only fair to say that

he is the mainspring of our cause, the foundation upon which the whole edifice of the revolution is to be built up!"

Coming into Pestel's room at the hotel Obolensky said cheerfully: "Let us walk, Pavel Ivanovich, the weather is just wonderful." They started out at once for the Moika.

The huge double-headed eagle on the roof of the three-storied building of the Russo-American Company could be seen from afar, lit up in the rays of the setting sun.

"Rileyev's verses keep running in my head all the time," Pestel said. "You remember those lines he wrote to the Tsar that time when everyone looked to him as a liberator of the Greeks: 'The monarch flies to do his deed.'"

"Those verses always remind me of Nikolai Turgenyev's clever words," Obolensky said shyly. "You cannot help agreeing with them. He said once: 'Why should Russians show more sympathy for the sufferings of an alien people than for the truly desperate plight of the countless slaves in their own country.' Indeed, why?"

"Give us time and we'll free them all," Pestel said grimly. "What you can do is hasten that time. Unless the two Societies unite our cause will not succeed."

"I'd be glad to, Pavel Ivanovich, with all my heart," Obolensky said with deep feeling. "I am really delighted at the acquisition our Society has made in the person of Kondrati Rileyev. He will stir us all up!"

A retired sub-lieutenant, who had held office as an assessor at the criminal court, Rileyev had won sudden fame as a poet. The stir aroused by the Semyonovsky mutiny had barely subsided when there came another event that created a sensation in the capital. It was the menacing, daring voice of the poet, a voice of protest against the cruel reprisals taken against the Semyonovsky men.

Rileyev's poem *To the Favourite* appeared in the tenth issue of the journal *Neusky Zritel* (*Neva Spectator*). The description was too faithful, the appearance of the verses themselves too well-timed to leave doubt in anyone's mind that the satire was aimed at Arakcheyev. Public feeling ran high against the brutality of that protégé of the Arakcheyev school, the notorious Colonel Schwarz, who was responsible for the death of so many soldiers, and the whole of progressive St. Petersburg recited the closing lines of the poem:

*O tyrant, tremble! He may yet be born,
A Brutus or Cató—a monarch-hater sworn!*

The offended favourite was expected to wreak dire vengeance. Both the young poet and the audacious editor of the journal were pitied. But nothing happened. Arakcheyev judiciously decided to ignore the satire, pretending that the cap did not fit him, and the threat of savage reprisals passed over.

Rileyev was a godsend to the Northern Society both as a poet and a public figure of no little prominence in the capital.

A democrat and staunch defender of the common people, he had come into constant contact with them in his capacity of legal assessor. A peasant riot having occurred on the estate of Count Razumovsky in the Oranienbaum Uyezd in 1821 as a result of the hard conditions of their life, the case had come before the court, and despite the fact that Razumovsky had very influential people on his side, Rileyev had pleaded the cause of his serfs.

There was another story current in town pointing to Rileyev's popularity. Count Miloradovich was said to have threatened legal proceedings against a man of the lower middle class who protested his innocence of a serious offence of which he had been wrongfully accused.

The man, hearing that the case had been handed over to the court, had fallen upon his knees before the Count with expressions of gratitude: "Now I am sure of being acquitted, because Rileyev is one of the judges. He will not let an innocent man be ruined."

In the autumn of 1823 Rileyev wrote his ode *Civic Courage*, in which one stanza was dedicated to Admiral Mordvinov, a man held in great esteem:

*Why should our souls with anguish fill
While in our country's Council still,
Among its motley throng of peers,
Abides that titan of the years
Of glorious Ekaterina—
The ever-vigilant Mordvinov?...*

Fyodor Glinka, a member of the Secret Society, who was a regular visitor at Mordvinov's house, had shown him Rileyev's ode. The Admiral had been flattered and had asked to be introduced to the author. Eventually he offered Rileyev the post of Office Manager in the Russo-American Company of which he was an official promoter.

What with his new official duties, the journal *Polyarnaya Zvezda* (*Polar Star*), which he published in co-operation with Alexander Bestuzhev, and the Secret Society, into which he threw himself with enthusiasm, Rileyev's life became one of seething activity.

His friends were quick to perceive that Rileyev, the newly enrolled member, was all eagerness to be up and doing, whereas Nikita Muravyov had become a "stumbling block."

Pestel was convinced that Rileyev would soon become the head of the Northern Society. While listening to Obolensky's rapturous stories about him, he was turning over in his mind what leading questions to put to Rileyev in order to find out what political grounding he had. He intended to draw Rileyev out, the more so that Obolensky

had said: "Rileyev is not averse to the idea of a republican system. He merely believes that Russia is not yet ripe for it."

Rileyev's wife and little daughter were not at home. He was sitting alone in his study where he received Pestel and Obolensky most affably.

His desk was littered with copies of the second issue of the *Polyarnaya Zvezda*.

"'Rileyev's Star is rising again on the literary horizon'—that's the latest witticism of our St. Petersburg writers," Obolensky said with a smile, gazing fondly at Rileyev.

"And they call us 'Polar Knights'—not a bad nickname," Rileyev said, handing Pestel a copy of the journal. "There are some engravings by Orlovsky—a splendid adornment. Fifteen hundred copies have been sold in three weeks."

"That's a rare achievement in the book world. I congratulate you!" Obolensky said.

He frankly admired Rileyev. The latter's striking appearance, no less than his noble nature and talents, attracted him irresistibly. Rileyev was a slight man with a darkish face. The heavy eyebrows, almost meeting over the bridge of his nose, gave his face a forbidding look. But this vanished when he smiled, and at such moments his large eyes, lusty with life and feeling, would sparkle.

"His eyes are like those of the youth in the Ravenna mosaics," Pestel thought, recollecting the ancient picture he had seen in a Paris museum.

Rileyev's eyes were black, but not a dead black: they resembled an opaque topaz, which seems to shine softly from within. It was a most remarkable face to which the term handsome could hardly be applied; it had a stronger attraction than good looks.

"His *Voinarovsky* is published in this issue, you

know," Obolensky said, stealing a glance at Rileyev to see how he took it.

But Rileyev was pleased, if anything.

"I am so glad Pushkin thinks highly of that poem of mine," he said with youthful candour.

On Rileyev's desk lay a piece of masonry with Napoleon's monogram on it.

"Where did you get that?" Pestel asked.

"One of our allies, an Austrian, gave it to me as a souvenir in 1814, when they were taking down the quadriga from the *Arc de Triomphe*, which Napoleon had carried off from Venice. In those days the white flag of the French kings was already fluttering from the Column Vendôme where Napoleon's statue had recently been standing. Marshal Ney was being tried in the court while the triumphant royalists were going about the streets singing their song about Henry IV. I was in Paris then."

Rileyev looked at Pestel as if he had only just realized who the man was, and smiled confidently.

Obolensky had only been waiting for that sudden smile of Rileyev's, which revealed his noble soul better than any words could have done. Convinced now that Pestel, whose opinion he set great store by, could not help liking Rileyev, Obolensky got up from the sofa to take his leave.

"Well, I leave you two to come to a good understanding. I have business to see to," he said in his usual gentle manner.

Pestel and Rileyev were left by themselves.

Pestel began to speak about Russia's state system and its proposed reorganization while his practised eye took in all the thoughts and feelings reflected in the face of his interlocutor. Of Rileyev's excellent qualities Pestel had no doubt. Himself a man of stern moral fibre, he lacked in his dealings with people that impulsive charm of manner with which Rileyev was so richly endowed.

The conversation somehow quickly reduced itself to questions and answers. Pestel's tone assumed that unpleasant edge which men who accused him of acting the haughty dictator found so objectionable.

Pestel subtly questioned Rileyev as to what form of government he thought most suitable for Russia. Rileyev was forced to admit that the English constitution was obsolete and could only satisfy the upper classes, the lords and the tradesmen. The people were far in advance of them.

Then the conversation touched on the Spanish constitution. Pestel probed for Rileyev's opinions like an experienced examiner. He casually picked up the fragment with Napoleon's monogram on it and suddenly said: "If we are to have a despot rule us, I should prefer Napoleon of all men. Look what he did for France! He thought more of a man's abilities than of his descent, and paved the way for a more just advancement which was formerly closed by prejudice—"

"May God save us from Napoleon!" Rileyev exclaimed. "Today, though, he is absolutely impossible," he added almost angrily. "Frankly, Pavel Ivanovich," he said, standing up and looking Pestel squarely in the face, "I emphatically object to the violent introduction of a new state system of any kind! The most we can do is merely prepare the project of a future government. Whether it is adopted or not will depend entirely upon the National Assembly."

Rileyev had never met Pestel before. His friends had warned him that he would meet a very dangerous and ambitious man, and this rather warped his judgement at first. He hardly gathered the import of Pestel's words; all he was aware of was his imperious tone, his drilling eyes, accustomed to command obedience. For a moment the thought even flashed through his mind that Pestel was aiming to become a Napoleon himself.

But despite a natural irritation against the catechism he was being put through, he was conscious of a deep though still vague impression which inspired in him a great respect for the forceful character of his remarkable visitor. After Pestel's departure, he sat for a long time sunk deep in thought.

" 'A revolutionary mind,' Pushkin says of him," Rileyev said to himself, " 'one of the most original minds in Russia.' Yes, that's what he is—a revolutionary of the mind," Rileyev whispered and added sadly: "And many of us are merely revolutionaries by heart: we really don't know yet what we want! But we ought to know it and want it well enough to face any ordeal."

Pestel left Rileyev with a curious feeling of affection towards him. It seemed to him that he had met not a comrade but a dearly-loved son, although there was no great difference in their ages. He felt that Rileyev was ready to give himself utterly to the cause, and that his impassioned word was capable of winning over many other such lovers of freedom as himself.

CHAPTER NINE

Nikita Muravyov's house, in which the members of the Secret Society gathered, was built at the end of the eighteenth century. Muravyov's mother, Ekaterina Fyodorovna, bought it soon after she had moved over from Moscow and made it the meeting point for the large Muravyov family. The Sunday family dinners sometimes congregated nearly a hundred people.

There one could meet statesmen and striplings entering upon life, brilliant Guardsmen and distant relatives from some rustic retreat. All were equally welcome.

Batyushkov, the poet, a relative of the Muravyovs, was a frequent guest. "At last I see again the Admiralty

spire, Fontanka, this house . . . and so many fond faces, to me the dearest in the world!" he wrote fervidly. And only recently the poor poet had been brought here hopelessly insane—there was a taint of madness in his family.

Karamzin and his family had lived on the top floor of the Muravyovs' house for five years, and when they moved out the rooms were occupied by Nikita Muravyov and his young wife Alexandra (*née* Chernishova).

Here Nikita Muravyov used to argue hotly with Karamzin about his complacent "acceptance of things," so distinctly expressed in his famous saying that history reconciled one to the imperfections of the visible order of things, which were ordinary phenomena in all ages; it afforded consolation in state evils, proving that similar and far worse evils had existed without destroying the state.

In those days the "restless" Nikita had held sharply opposing views: "There should be not peace, but eternal war between good and evil! Virtuous citizens should be eternally leagued against errors and vices."

Tall and well-knit, with wavy hair and the gentle glance of a dreamer, Nikita Muravyov was only two years Pestel's junior, but, like Rileyev, he looked much younger. Stately Swan—was his "Arzamas" sobriquet, and it aptly described his stateliness of mien.

Nikita Muravyov was by nature an arm-chair scholar, and there had been only one or two occasions in his life when he had revealed a sudden capacity for letting himself be carried away. One such occasion had been the Patriotic War when he had run away from home at the age of seventeen and joined the army in the field.

He was taken for a spy at first and thrown into prison. The misunderstanding was not cleared up until Count Rastopchin had interrogated him personally.

Other outstanding acts, which threatened his life as

well as his liberty, were those that associated him with Pestel.

Such was the trend of Pestel's agitated thoughts as he approached the house of the Muravyovs—this and the outcome of the important conversation facing him.

Nikita Muravyov's study was a magnificent room with many windows overlooking the Fontanka and the Mikhailovsky Castle on the opposite bank. Glancing at the massive stone pile, associated in his mind with the death of Emperor Paul, Pestel was reminded of the impassioned lines of Pushkin's *Ode to Liberty*, which, according to his friends, he had written while gazing at the brooding castle from the windows of Turgenev's house, which was almost next door to that of the Muravyovs.

Pestel and Nikita Muravyov met very cordially. Deep down in their hearts they were still linked by ties of former friendship, which were stronger than blood ties.

"It is so important that we should come to an understanding—and that is why I am here—that I think we ought not to waste a minute's time," Pestel said, settling himself into a deep arm-chair.

"I share your opinion," Nikita answered cheerfully, "but it is for you to take the cudgels up first. You have torn my *Constitution* to rags already."

They sat in silence for a while, smoking.

"What is it exactly you prize most of all in your *Constitution*?" Pestel asked.

"The mere fact, it seems to me, that it consistently upholds the principle of equality of all in the eyes of the law."

"But going hand in hand with that equality," Pestel said in a tone which he tried to keep soft, "you have the principle of social and political *inequality*. Don't you lay down property qualifications for filling a post in representative institutions? According to your project, if I

am not mistaken, all citizens are divided into four categories?"

"Yes, of course," Nikita answered with studied calmness. "The first category I assume to have a capital of thirty thousand, the second half as much, the third two thousand, and the last, five hundred rubles. The rights correspond to the capital."

"I see," Pestel murmured. "Under these qualifications all the peasants are deprived of their rights. All the peasants to a man, and the lower classes of the town population?"

Pestel took a turn about the room, then stopped and said in a tone of frank reproach: "Do you realize that in making all rights dependent on wealth you are giving access to power only to the rich?"

He strode up to Nikita Muravyov, and looking him angrily in the eye, said as though uttering a verdict: "Such a constitution will create a terrible aristocracy of wealth!"

"Go on, please, have your say," Nikita Muravyov said somewhat haughtily.

"The state exists for the good of each and all, and not for the benefit of a few," Pestel began vehemently, "and the exclusion of the majority of people from the enjoyment of those benefits is unjust and despotic. I emphatically protest against privileges of any kind for either the old feudal aristocracy or your new moneyed aristocracy. I repeat, in the interests of the few you are committing a gross injustice towards the majority."

"And is not your plan of state reorganization gross violence?" Muravyov started angrily, but Pestel interrupted with proud dignity:

"My plan, as expounded in the *Russkaya Pravda*, is based above all upon equality. It grants full equality to all citizens. The aim that I pursue is the greatest possible welfare for each and all."

"But, I repeat, at the cost of shocking violence!" Muravyov interposed doggedly.

"The idea of a forcible upheaval today is not an arbitrary act but merely a *necessity*," Pestel said with emphasis. "It wasn't so long ago that you agreed with me in this. It was the acme of your revolutionary ideas, which for some reason you have fallen short of today. If you don't mind I will run over the chief points so as to refresh your memory before you finally dismiss them."

Nikita Muravyov nodded.

"You were present at the conference at Fonvizin's when Yakushkin volunteered to put the Tsar out of the way. And when his proposal was rejected you and your cousin Artamon Muravyov declared that you were ready at your own peril to assassinate the Tsar publicly at the ball that was to be held in the Granovitaya Palata. Your stand was militant enough then! And before that, when Lunin set forth his plan for masked men assassinating the Tsar on his way to Tsarskoye Selo, were you not one of those who approved the idea? You understood perfectly well then that in order to put theory into practice the revolutionary party had to act upon the principles of a most rigid internal dictatorship. Otherwise, the result would be exactly what your Northern Society has proved it to be—just idle chatter! And when the Council members began to yell: 'Pestel is preaching terror,' who sided with me? You did, Nikita Mikhailovich!"

Muravyov got up to answer but changed his mind and resumed his seat. He realized that it were best to let Pestel have his say.

"And the meeting at Glinka's?" Pestel said in a rising tone. "I called for you first, if you remember. We decided to act together in supporting the idea of a republican state against the monarchy. Did you swerve then? No, you did not. And what is more, shortly afterwards a still more important meeting was held at Ivan Shipov's

house with Ilya Dolgoruky in the chair, and you put the case on practical lines and drew the only possible logical conclusion—that regicide was unavoidable. Yes, you recognized that as an inevitable condition of a coup d'état! And you went beyond this. We were all enthusiastic over the victories of the insurgent republics—they had not been crushed then—and here were you proposing an armed rising. I supported you, of course. I, too, carried this common idea of ours to its logical conclusion.” Pestel paused, then repeated with relentless emphasis: “Yes, our common revolutionary idea concerning the necessity of a dictatorship. An idea, Nikita Mikhailovich, which so strongly shocks you now and which is the principal obstacle to the amalgamation of our two Societies. You believed in the necessity of a dictatorship those days, and now?”

Pestel broke off abruptly and fell silent. He could not bring himself to say that it was now Nikita Muravyov who was trying to persuade the members of his Society that he, Pestel, was demanding a dictatorship for reasons of personal ambition.

Pestel went close up to Muravyov and asked point-blank: “Am I mistaken or not in saying that my entire plan was fully supported by you?”

“You are not mistaken,” Muravyov said in a firm voice, although he avoided Pestel’s eyes. “At the time that is what I believed.”

“Then let us go all the way back and revive these necessary, and today rather sad, reminiscences,” Pestel said. “When travelling to the Crimea you purposely went out of your way to see me in Tulchin; you attended all our conferences; you were made a member of the Directorate of the Southern Society. You had no doubts that only a clear, definite programme for the new republican order could prevent the disturbances and disorder which usually attend a revolution. You did not doubt

that my *Russkaya Pravda* served as a guarantee that the Provisional Government would act solely in the interests of the citizens. The lack of such a programme would plunge our country into endless troubles the day after we took the revolutionary power—discord would be inevitable, and everyone would start acting on his own. Nothing but a dictatorship can keep the new government from falling apart!”

Pestel paused with a thoughtful air, then resumed in a quiet voice that sounded tired: “I am accused of forcing people to make decisions that go against their peaceable nature. That is naïve, to say the least.” He smiled ironically and lit up his short pipe to hide his growing agitation.

“Your Northern Society,” he said slowly, sinking onto the couch, “has at last come by a definite programme of its own. It differs from my *Russkaya Pravda*. And that programme is *yours*. Now you can have your say, Nikita Mikhailovich.”

“I shall answer you in all sincerity,” Nikita Muravyov said, crossing to an arm-chair closer to Pestel. “You are right—the conclusions I have finally arrived at today in regard to the revolutionary action confronting us are at variance with those which you have drawn. I have given this matter deep thought and gone thoroughly into the question, and have come to the conclusion that a constitutional monarchy for our country is preferable to all others. I am convinced that only the establishment of such a representative form of government holds out hope for a well-ordered life for the Russian nation,” Muravyov said somewhat solemnly. “I do not deny that until recently regicide and a revolutionary dictatorship seemed to me, as it does to you, the only saving remedy. Today I think that we should really try to get the Tsar to grant a constitution—”

“Haven’t you seen enough constitutions signed in

your time!" Pestel broke in warmly. "And did not all the kings renounce them there and then and reduce their peoples to still worse slavery? Half-measures in the case of a revolution are as bad as a surgeon who, allegedly out of compassion, avoids an essential operation and thereby kills his patient. Don't you see that our wavering plays into the hands of the autocracy! Your 'slow action' in the long run will merely help Arakcheyev and his ilk to draw the noose tighter round the neck of the people."

There was a pause. Both were deeply agitated.

"I hear," Pestel said, "that over a hundred and fifty thousand acres have been added to your already huge estates—inherited from your grandfather on your mother's side. Knowing you as I do, I am sure this cannot influence you, still less make you share the interests of the higher nobility. I am sure it can't!"

"I am glad that you have that much faith in me," Muravyov said with a wry smile. "I trust I'll be able to live up to it."

He took hold of Pestel's elbow and said earnestly: "If I had to give up all my fortune for the cause of our Secret Society, believe me I would do it without hesitation. One thing I know for certain—both you and I are prepared to serve the cause of the people's liberation to the last drop of our blood."

"And in that service," Pestel hastily put in, "our forces should be united!"

He held his hand out. Muravyov gripped it hard and said unexpectedly: "And later, when the time comes to act, we shall make final arrangements for uniting our Societies."

* * *

The rest of Pestel's sojourn in St. Petersburg was spent at meetings of the members of the Northern and Southern Societies and discussions concerning the adop-

tion of a common programme. Obolensky was more inclined towards amalgamation than anyone else, but Trubetskoy could not overcome his distrust of Pestel, and persisted in considering him a dangerous and ambitious man who would not accept a single point of Muravyov's *Constitution*, which all the Northerners had approved. Pestel, he maintained, would insist on having his own way.

Such was the atmosphere in St. Petersburg, whither Pestel had arrived with an open heart and great plans. His persistence only tended to rouse Trubetskoy's suspicions, and the latter took a boyish pride in showing his distrust and rubbing it in. Once Pestel remarked reproachfully: "The man who distrusts another and suspects him of personal motives will feel ashamed when time proves that he never had such motives."

There was one stormy meeting at which Pestel, who usually had his feelings well under control, finally lost his temper, banged the table with his fist and exclaimed: "There *will* be a republic after all!"

In the end one thing was clearly ascertained—the need for an agreement on the question of united action. It was recorded in the following terms:

"Should any find it necessary to start action, all the others are obliged to support them immediately."

Before returning to Tulchin Pestel paid a short visit to his mother's estate Vasilievo in the Smolensk Gubernia. He enjoyed the country life and was free to do what he liked all day. His father was absorbed in writing the memoirs of his long service and describing the intrigues of the Siberian embezzlers of public funds who had ruined his career. His mother was busy about the house or pottering around the little hothouse.

Sometimes mother and son would sit in the arbour, chatting, and recollecting how many splendid books she had read to him in his childhood, and how deeply thrilled

they had been by the heroes' noble dreams of freedom. His mother had been the first person to awaken his soul to lofty aspirations, an ambitious desire to leave his mark upon life by some noble deed.

"If Mother only knew what those heroes of Plutarch, those dreams of great deeds have brought her son to!" Pestel mused sadly, but he never spoke to her about his revolutionary activities. He knew that for all her intelligence and talent she would not understand and would merely be shocked and lose her peace of mind. Sufferings enough were in store for her.

Early morning found him roaming the banks of the swift river, wandering about the cheerful birch copses and hills, which were already white with blossoming wild strawberries.

There was much that needed thinking out anew. The recent stormy meetings of the Secret Society, and particularly the final decision, adopted by all, to fix the armed rising for 1826, evoked disturbing thoughts in his mind.

And now again the failure of the Spanish revolution and the execution of the brave Riego affected Pestel as if it were his personal tragedy.

On October 26, 1823, by command of King Ferdinand, this friend of the people was carted through the whole of Madrid like a common criminal and hanged. Amid a universal hush of submission Ferdinand's reign was made securer than ever before. Riego's execution shook the Secret Society's reliance on a military coup, and no one felt this disappointment more keenly than Pestel.

The news concerning the successive failures of the revolutions in Europe had had at first a disheartening effect upon Pestel. Speaking to his intimate friend Baryatinsky, Pestel had confessed bitterly: "The situation now clearly proves that we have started a futile thing that will ruin us without doing our country any good!"

Before Pestel's departure for St. Petersburg young Kryukov had brought him a poem which Pushkin had sent to Turgenev. This poem, like almost everything else Pushkin wrote, expressed people's innermost thoughts and hopes for the great victories of the liberative movement. But the revolutions had been crushed, people's hopes defeated.

Pestel repeated Pushkin's verses—they were like a summary of his own thoughts, like music, which often speaks more subtly and expressively than words:

*I ventured forth before the morning
The seeds of liberty to sow;
With noble flame my heart is burning
While o'er the fettered fields I go.
But viewing the still fruitless plain,
I know my labours are in vain.*

"That is a staunch fellow-traveller if ever there was one," Pestel thought with admiration. "He is with us heart and soul. His splendid verses express our ardent thoughts and hopes, our painful doubts, and they pour fresh strength into our struggle."

He recollected another verse of Pushkin's, a verse written in an entirely different vein, which circulated secretly from hand to hand:

*Come, blow a storm, ye winds of vengeance,
Break down the bastions of Wrong!
Sing out like thunder, voice of Freedom,
And may all slaves join in the song!*

Amid the stillness of this rural scene, with a deep feeling that lit up his stern features, Pestel suddenly found himself repeating the lines:

*Come, blow a storm, ye winds of vengeance,
Break down the bastions of Wrong!*

He felt ashamed of his momentary weakness, ashamed of those words of despair that he had spoken to Baryatinsky.

Pestel's room on his mother's estate contained an old bureau in which he had once kept his cherished creation, the *Russkaya Pravda*. The bureau held another treasure—a rare copy made by hand of the first edition of Radishchev's *A Journey from Petersburg to Moscow* published in the reign of Catherine II.

Although, at the beginning of his reign, Alexander I had still amused himself by playing at liberalism, he was not at all inclined to revive the memory of a man who had been so dangerous to the autocracy. When Radishchev's sons had asked for permission to republish their father's book, the Tsar refused. When the collected works of Radishchev were published in 1806 his chief work—the *Journey*—was omitted from it.

One day Pestel put the sheets of that copy of the *Journey* in his pocket and went far out into the woods where no one would be in his way.

"Come, blow a storm, ye winds of vengeance..." Pushkin's verse came involuntarily to his mind. And he answered it aloud, clenching the sheets in his hand: "Here is the storm! What a small book it is, but how potent! Still passing from hand to hand despite prohibitions, and firing men's hearts."

He derived pleasure from the knowledge that the influence, direct and indirect, of Radishchev's book waxed stronger with time, and that the Secret Society and he himself could trace the origin of their ideas, feelings and revolutionary will to Radishchev.

The very name of the first secret society—"True and Loyal Sons of the Fatherland"—had been his. And the leaflets, secretly circulated by the Preobrazhensky men after the Semyonovsky affair—had they not been written in the true Radishchev spirit? And did not Radishchev's main idea tally with the theses of his own *Russkaya Pravda*, the idea that slaves were to be made free?

The reading of Radishchev's book stirred in Pestel a deep admiration for its author, who had succeeded in making such a strong impact upon slumbering minds. What a powerful, daring note he had struck in saying that men in their own country were deprived of all rights, those elementary rights without which men could not live or breathe.

"Are not conditions of life in the military colonies the same? And we are still wasting our time talking instead of immediately overthrowing the autocracy that begot them," Pestel thought with a pang.

Truly, this book had been written for all people and all times. "I looked about me, and my heart was seared by the sufferings of mankind," the author wrote.

Pestel read on with ever-fresh amazement at Radishchev's ability to show in a few simple words the cause of the evil and inequality from which mankind was suffering: "Man's woes come from man himself."

"Consequently," Pestel thought, "all the conditions of life have to be changed? What a revolutionary idea!"

What impressed him was the fearlessness with which Radishchev said what he had to say without mincing his words—just what the members of the Northern Society lacked.

Burning with wrath on account of the people's wrongs under the despotic rule of the autocracy, Radishchev would not be reconciled to any mere restriction of that rule. He struck at the root of it without a qualm. As he wrote to a friend, residing in Tobolsk, "Never so long as the world exists will a tsar voluntarily relinquish an iota of his power...."

The question was: How is it that Radishchev, half a century ago, could understand what many members of the Secret Society could not understand, and what Nikita Muravyov had to be persuaded of anew?

Studying his own heart, however, Pestel had to admit

that the *Journey* contained some ideas which he could not, or rather would not, accept. Uneasy doubts assailed him when he read the passages which asserted that the people would win freedom for itself when it was no longer able to bear its slavery. For "out of suffering liberty is born."

Still more disconcerting, nay, frightening, were the impassioned lines calling to revolt: "O would that the slaves, in durance vile befettered, poured out the vials of their desperate wrath and smashed our heads, the inhuman heads of their masters, with the iron of their shackles, and drenched their fields with our blood! What would the nation lose thereby? Soon great men would be thrown up from their midst to take the part of the downtrodden, but they would have other thoughts of themselves and would be bereft of the right to oppress. This is no dream; the eye pierces the heavy veil of time that hides the future from our gaze."

That then was the staff Radishchev had leaned upon in his great and unequal struggle! A profound faith in the Russian people, in their mighty powers, creative and constructive!

* * *

Pestel left his parents' village in the spring of 1824 with a clear and strengthened mind. Radishchev's book, which he had reread with close attention, proved to be an important event in his life and left an indelible impression upon his mind. He had a feeling as if he had met the living Radishchev, and that the meeting had refreshed his spirits and renewed his strength a hundred-fold.

PART TWO





CHAPTER ONE



estel returned to his regiment in the village of Lintsi, happy in the knowledge that the Northern Society had recognized the necessity of a rising in 1826. He was anxious to see Sergei Muravyov and Bestuzhev-Ryumin as quickly as possible. He now knew that those two men, outwardly so different, were linked by strong ties of friendship that made them one. Bestuzhev, now an ardent supporter of Muravyov, was himself a gifted and fiery speaker who could kindle the enthusiasm of the young men as no one else could.

"They are both one heart and one mind," their comrades said of them.

Mikhail Bestuzhev-Ryumin was the youngest member of the Secret Society, but his opinions carried weight with everybody, for it was soon discovered that he was a very capable organizer with a gift of sincere and vivid eloquence that could stir the mass.

Finding no worthy application, his tremendous energy had sought vent in aimless activities that had irritated a good many people. This amazing energy displayed itself as soon as he became a member of the Southern Society. It was like a turbulent torrent, which, tamed and channelled, sets out at last upon a useful course.

The attitude of the Society's members, who had recently regarded him merely as a restless youngster, underwent a sharp change.

General Orlov had referred to him as "that noisy cockerel," while the gentlemanly Matvei Muravyov had urged everyone to cease scoffing at the volcanic lieutenant. Now Matvei wagged his head ruefully at his brother and Bestuzhev, who had become inseparable friends, saying: "They're as thick as thieves." He was afraid that Bestuzhev's ardour would get his brother Sergei into trouble.

Presently a Polish Patriotic Society was found to exist, and the Council authorized Bestuzhev to enter into negotiations with it. During the last few months Bestuzhev had been seeking an opportunity to make the acquaintance of the Association of United Slavs, of whose existence rumours had long been current.

Despite Bestuzhev's excellent qualities, his close relations with Muravyov worried Pestel, too. His fiery impulsive temperament, far from being cooled by Muravyov's more mature mind, threatened to sweep him into hasty and unpremeditated decisions. Pestel, for one thing, suspected that the so-called "Belaya Tserkov Plan" still had a strong hold upon the imagination of those two leaders of the Vasilkov Branch, although it had been emphatically rejected at the last meeting.

This plan was as follows: when the Tsar, at the forthcoming manoeuvres of the Third Corps in the vicinity of Belaya Tserkov, would take up his residence in

Branicka's palace, the members of the Society were to take the place of the sentinels, force an entry into Alexander's bedroom during the night and assassinate him there.

After that the Third Corps, under Bestuzhev-Ryumin, was to march on Moscow, its ranks being augmented on the way by insurgent troops. Muravyov-Apostol was to go to St. Petersburg. Pestel was to remain in Kiev, from where he was to raise a rebellion among the southern military colonies.

Pestel's personal feelings were not wounded by this independent plan of the Vasilkov Branch, but he thought it would be better to start the rising in the early months of 1826, as soon as his Vyatka Regiment took up guard duties. This would enable them to seize the Army Commander and all his office and staff.

A few days ago he had learned that when Poggio, a prominent member of the Society who had arrived from St. Petersburg, had told Bestuzhev-Ryumin about the lukewarm temper of some of the Northerners, the latter had exclaimed: "If the Northerners still prefer to do nothing and Pestel keeps putting it off, we shall start the rising ourselves! Our forces are enough to begin with, and after that regiments and whole divisions will join us."

This too bellicose mood of Bestuzhev-Ryumin worried Pestel. This, and still more, the letter he had written to the Poles on his own account and which exposed their whole revolutionary cause to extreme danger. Fortunately, Volkonsky had intercepted the letter, which, after being read at the Tulchin Branch, was burnt. Pestel, nevertheless, decided to go without delay to Belaya Tserkov, where Bestuzhev was staying with his friend Muravyov.

Pestel felt greatly attracted towards Sergei Muravyov-Apostol. Sergei shared with his brother the family

likeness—both had that ancient Slav cast of countenance inherited from their mother, who was of Serbian origin—but Sergei differed from the stand-offish Matvei in character, his being full of engaging candour and a curious inward charm enhanced by his readiness for self-sacrifice.

His resolve, unoppressed by doubts, to give all his strength and life itself to the cause of liberating his country and his people, was a natural part of himself, a simple necessity, like the very breath of life. The soldiers, grateful to him for the sincere sympathy he bore them and for the solicitous care he took of their needs, were prepared to follow him blindly at his first call.

Upon receiving Pestel's letter saying that he intended visiting Belaya Tserkov, Muravyov made arrangements for all to meet in the untenanted rooms of Povalo-Shveikovsky, Colonel of the Saratov Regiment, who was a member of the Society.

Evening found Pestel walking down an avenue of dark poplars, which smelt sweetly after the heavy summer downpour. He was making his way to the house where the leaders of the Vasilkov Branch were expecting him. The officers had just dined, and while waiting for the guest's arrival, were drinking liqueur in the library and smoking long chibouks.

Pestel came in with his usual firm stride and shook hands heartily with Muravyov-Apostol and Bestuzhev. His face was shaved with extra care and his hair neatly brushed at the temples, and his whole trim figure, with its outward appearance of geniality, expressed a determination to thrash matters out.

The conversation started at once on the subject uppermost in everyone's mind.

Pestel spoke with admiration about the always animated, earnest Rileyev and the noble-minded Obolensky who was ever ready to accept and defend every new idea,

no matter how daring. Those two were the real support, the heart and soul of the cause in the North. Pestel made no secret of the fact that certain members of the Northern Society did not agree with his *Russkaya Pravda*, but since all desired to reach an understanding it was necessary to call a meeting of representatives of all the Branches.

"But now, after what you have told us, Pavel Ivanovich, what alternative can you offer to our 'Belaya Tserkov Plan'?" Bestuzhev said. Agitation, which he tried to suppress, imparted to his voice a somewhat challenging tone. "Up till now the only thing that has restrained Sergei Muravyov and myself has been your assertion that the Northern Society was to be in the vanguard. But do you mean to say you still stand by that opinion after visiting St. Petersburg, when you are persuaded that complete unanimity does not yet exist in the Northern Society? I am by no means certain that this meeting you propose for reaching a final decision to start the rising in 'twenty-six is not just another blind bargain."

"If that is what you think, you are mistaken. We cannot afford to wait any longer. The year 'twenty-six is the limit," Pestel began gloomily, but Muravyov-Apostol interrupted him excitedly:

"We can't put it off so long, Pavel Ivanovich! They'll lay us by the heels long before that. One high-ranking relative of ours got word to my father the other day that the Tsar is perfectly well aware that a conspiracy exists and knows the chief participants. He may place the matter into Arakcheyev's hands at any moment. To keep putting off the rising indefinitely is simply preposterous. As far as I'm concerned, I tell you, Pavel Ivanovich," Muravyov went on, looking straight into Pestel's inscrutable black eyes, "I tell you frankly that as soon as I am certain of having several regiments in my hands, I shall raise a rebellion before they have time to shut my

mouth, and I'll show what a power of retributive justice lies hidden in Russian hearts!"

Pestel, with a nervous twitch of his shoulder, was on the point of retorting that nothing but useless bloodshed could result from such precipitate action, but he held his peace.

Bestuzhev, in his youthful ardour, took this as a sign of wavering, and glancing at the clock, he said insinuatingly: "Colonel Tiesenhausen should be here soon. He wanted to see you, and in that connection Muravyov and I have a request to make of you."

He turned quickly towards Muravyov as though seeking support in that quarter. The involuntary gesture betrayed his extreme youthfulness, belied though it was by his powerful shoulders and already heavy features.

"We need Tiesenhausen," Muravyov said. "The whole regiment is in his hands, and he himself is a zealous member of our Society. Besides, thanks to him, Bestuzhev is able to visit me freely as an officer of his regiment and maintain contact between the members of all three Branches—Vasilkov, Kamenka and Tulchin."

"What do you want me to do with Tiesenhausen?" Pestel asked.

"If there's going to be any further delay Tiesenhausen wants to give it up," Bestuzhev said quickly.

"In a word, keep the pot boiling, as they say in the Cadet Corps," Muravyov said with a smile. "This Tiesenhausen is a good man, although he is a bit queer. Just imagine, he thinks nothing of taking the Tsar's life, but shudders at the very idea of riots and disturbances breaking out during the rising, and proposes, in the event of any hitches occurring in the provisioning of the troops, to give up all his property, including his wife's wardrobe. Will you reassure him that no time will be lost in starting the rising?"

Before Pestel could reply the orderly announced the Commander of the Poltava Regiment. Bestuzhev ran out to meet him in the hall and immediately started speaking to him excitedly in French. They came in still conversing. Colonel Vasili Tiesenhausen, a Russianized German, was much shorter in stature than Bestuzhev, and although he tried to give himself an air of importance as commander, he always felt put out by his subordinate's youthful dash and ardour.

Pestel bowed courteously to the Colonel, with whom he was but slightly acquainted.

Tiesenhausen, with the awkwardness of a shy man, took the chibouk that Muravyov offered him and began puffing at it in silence. Bestuzhev, continuing the conversation he had started in the hall, pointed to Pestel, saying: "Now Pavel Ivanovich will confirm to you himself, Colonel, that all our forces will unite in 'twenty-six. They'll unite and be launched."

Tiesenhausen took the pipe out of his mouth and said quietly: "The government has wind of our plans. We mustn't lose time."

"You can rest assured, Vasili Karlovich," Pestel said, "that we will start action before any measures of suppression are taken."

Pestel was genuinely convinced that the rising would succeed only in the event of the Secret Societies coming to an agreement among themselves and joining forces—and that, according to Pestel's calculations, could not be done before the year 'twenty-six. The argument of the leaders of the Vasilkov Branch in favour of executing the Tsar in the camps near Belaya Tserkov in 'twenty-five and beginning the rising with the forces of the South alone—in a word, the demand for his approval of their "Belaya Tserkov Plan" Pestel considered unreasonable. Therefore, in order not to frighten Tiesenhausen off, he answered evasively and turned the conversation to the

subject of preparedness, advising that special attention should be paid to the Kiev Arsenal.

"Haste in this business is as dangerous as procrastination," he said with faint irony. "At least we can now judge soberly what a mistake your 'Bobruisk Plan' would have been had it succeeded—which, fortunately, it did not. You naïvely thought it sufficient just to seize the Tsar and keep him in custody! One thing is certain—that we should not be sitting here now, carrying on this friendly conversation." Pestel's gesture took in the three officers. "As a matter of fact the gist of our conversation is what Pushkin has so happily been able to express in four lines of his *Ode to Liberty*:

*Quake, O ye sons of wanton Chance,
Ye tyrants of the world, beware!
And ye who suffer everywhere,
Take courage, bondsmen, and advance!*

"You couldn't have said it better!" Bestuzhev cried rapturously, and he asked Pestel eagerly: "Have you brought any news from St. Petersburg, Pavel Ivanovich? When I was last in Kamenka I heard that Pushkin was working hard in his Mikhailovskoye banishment."

Pestel for a moment became lost in thought.

"Here are some lines that were omitted from *The Prisoner of the Caucasus*," he said. "I got them from Rileyev." And he recited them by heart:

*O Freedom! It was you alone
He sought yet on this barren planet.*

"Wonderful! He might have been writing about us!" Bestuzhev exclaimed, and repeated the lines with deep feeling: "O Freedom! It was you alone he sought yet on this barren planet. . . ."

Tiesenhausen looked fondly at Bestuzhev.

"A fine young fellow," he said to Pestel. "It was he

who discovered the Poles, you know. I'm sorry, but I have to go." He rose and took his leave of Pestel with a shyness that looked oddly out of keeping with his colonel's uniform.

"I'd like to ask you a favour, Pavel Ivanovich. I have only a general idea of your *Russkaya Pravda*. Could you please give me an opportunity of reading your splendid work. I am so deeply impressed by the breadth and scope of your ideas—"

"I cannot give it to you just now, I'm sorry to say," Pestel answered. "I am now engaged in revising the principal clauses of the *Russkaya Pravda*—a work which I started in St. Petersburg. There are a good many things that need saying much more boldly in this second version."

"Your first version was enough to frighten the Northerners," Muravyov said with a smile. "You won't hit it off with them until you strike out all you have written about the land. Trubetskoy says outright: 'That Pestel's agrarian clause is a masked appeal for a rebellion against the nobles.'"

"There should be no nobles at all," Pestel retorted sharply. "I think the very name and class should be done away with. And he who called himself a nobleman will simply be registered in the volost lists as a member of the Russian community, the same as everyone else. Once we have undertaken to do away with the autocracy we must do away with it root and branch. And if we are going to lay our lives down, let it be for something really worth while, something we shall not regret."

And Pestel's grave face suddenly lit up with a young and radiant smile.

"I should like to have a word with Bestuzhev," he said, addressing Muravyov.

"Splendid, Pavel Ivanovich," the latter answered understandingly. "And I shall see the Colonel off."

Left alone with Bestuzhev, Pestel looked him full in the face and said quickly: "What news have you about the Poles?"

Bestuzhev was somewhat taken aback.

"Volkonsky said he would talk it over with Grodecki when he got to Kiev."

"One thing we should not forget—that the programme of the Polish Patriotic Society, with which we have been negotiating since 'twenty-three, cannot enlist our complete sympathy."

"But don't we want an independent Poland as much as they do?" Bestuzhev said in surprise.

"We do. But *what kind* of Poland?" Pestel said in clipped tones. "Not at all the kind some of them want—I mean those who are worrying only about the interests of the aristocracy. Their programme is to introduce the Constitution of the Third of May and preserve the privileges of the gentry. Why, under that constitution they can always make Constantine king, and what is more important, betray our revolution. Besides, Prince Jablonski said that England was supplying them with money and weapons, and therefore I strongly recommend caution with the Polish magnates. No incriminating documents, not a word in writing."

Bestuzhev reddened. He had just handed Volkonsky a letter with important contents for Grodecki, and felt guilty before the members of the Southern Society and before Pestel, to whom he had given his word to uphold the theses of the *Russkaya Pravda*. Bestuzhev, to give him credit, had been the first to advocate the necessity of establishing contact with the Poles in 'twenty-three, and the members of all three Branches had immediately agreed to this. Bestuzhev had been authorized straight away to conduct negotiations with the Polish Patriotic Society.

But Bestuzhev, as Pestel had foreseen, had been so

eager to carry out his "Belaya Tserkov Plan," that he had decided to press forward negotiations with the Poles.

The Southern Society had been conducting only preliminary negotiations with the Poles, which were to take the form of an agreement only after they had been approved by the Supreme Polish Council. Bestuzhev, however, had been too impatient to wait so long, and on the basis of those negotiations alone had written Grodecki a tactless letter containing the rebuke: "We are keeping our promise, but you are doing nothing." The Poles had been promised that all of them who came to St. Petersburg would be given every possible assistance on the part of the members of the Secret Society.

Worse still, Bestuzhev, on the spur of a youthful impulse, had issued an order to the Poles in the same letter to "seize Constantine immediately and destroy him. For that purpose await our action...."

Pestel was very angry.

"Through the Vasilkov Branch the whole of our revolutionary movement would have fallen into the Tsar's hands!" he almost shouted. "It is sheer criminal childishness, I repeat, to call for Constantine's assassination in Warsaw, and in writing, too! Luckily for you we burnt the letter. Do you realize what mischief you might have done?"

Bestuzhev held his hand out, and looking guiltily at Pestel with his blue eyes, murmured quickly: "Believe me, Pavel Ivanovich, I shall be more careful in future."

Pestel recovered his composure and wrung Bestuzhev's hand.

"I believe you," he said in a calm tone. "Keep me fully informed how your negotiations are proceeding."

Muravyov came in, and Pestel started to speak about Muravyov's cherished idea of introducing a new revolutionary catechism in place of the old catechism of the

Greek Orthodox Church which the soldiers learnt by heart as a matter of mere meaningless form.

"In learning it the soldier will have his eyes opened politically," Muravyov said earnestly. "Why, he will see at once that that greatest of all authorities—the word of God—stands for his interests and not the Tsar's, nay more, that it is directed against the tsars themselves."

"I wonder how you are going to deal with the famous maxim, 'There is no power but of God'?" Pestel said with faint irony, admiring Muravyov's sincerity. Bestuzhev threw himself into an arm-chair and laughed heartily.

"I am choosing with care, of course," Muravyov said, flushing. "I am using for the revolutionary catechism the words of the Apostle Paul, 'Be not ye the servants of men,' and try to prove in a simple intelligible manner that the Tsar is acting in defiance of the messenger of God, and consequently of God Himself. It will be easier then for the soldier to go against the Tsar—"

"It will be much easier for him," interrupted Pestel, "when we have sufficient confidence in ourselves to declare a reduction in his term of service and the abolition of serfdom for his family. Hence we should leave no stone unturned to hasten our victory."

Pestel presently took his leave.

"No doubt Pestel is right again—he usually is," Muravyov said ruefully, "but all the same I shall not drop my idea about a revolutionary catechism."

* * *

In August 1825, the Third Infantry Corps was mustered for review in the village of Leshchin, fifteen versts from Zhitomir. The Eighth Artillery Brigade was stationed in a pine wood in close proximity to the Chernigov Regiment.

Bestuzhev-Ryumin was almost a constant visitor in

Muravyov's spacious tent. Plausible excuses for his presence were invented by his superior officer and Secret Society associate Tiesenhausen.

The Leshchin camping season lasted only a fortnight, and during that brief period Bestuzhev was to bring about a complete union between the Slav League and the Southern Secret Society.

Through Tyutchev, a Semyonovsky officer and former colleague, Bestuzhev and Muravyov got to know that the Slavs had held a convention in the village of Chernikhov in March 1825, where they had elected as the president of their Society Pyotr Borisov, Sub-Lieutenant of the Eighth Artillery Brigade. The actual organization of the Society was to be completed in the summer, when the mustering of the troops under camping conditions would make it much easier to arrange meetings. Muravyov and Bestuzhev, upon learning this, decided that a splitting of forces was to be prevented at all costs, and that it was essential to secure unity with the Slavs.

"Our Southern Society already exists," said Muravyov, "and if the ideas of the Slavs fall in with our own there is no reason for them to waste time and energy going through the same thing. Let them join our Society."

The Slavs, too, were interested in the Southerners and desirous of making their closer acquaintance. The connecting link between the two Societies was Captain Tyutchev. He was a member of the Slav League and at the same time was on intimate terms with the Southerners, being a former Semyonovsky officer who had served in the same regiment with Sergei Muravyov. He told the Muravyovs about the first steps of the Slav League.

Its founders were the two Borisov brothers—Andrei and Pyotr, sons of a retired Major, who kept a large family on a beggarly pension. Despite a modest education, the Borisovs' father, who had passed for an eccentric dreamer in his set, was able to inspire his sons with an admiration

for the ancient republican heroes sung by Plutarch. The cruel conditions of Russian life fostered by the Arakcheyev regime, the servitude of the soldiers and the desperate poverty of the enthralled peasantry merely tended, with the passing of the years, to strengthen the youths' enthusiasm for the "free democracy," that highest form of social organization.

"Filled as we are with love for democratic freedom, we have sworn to lay down our lives in order to win it for our unfortunate country," Tyutchev said, repeating the words of Pyotr Borisov.

A constant striving after knowledge and self-perfection were regarded by the Borisov brothers as a necessary preparation for that service to their country to which they had dedicated themselves.

Late one afternoon Tyutchev was invited to Muravyov's tent for a detailed talk about the Slavs.

The hastily improvised camp structure stood among the reddish trunks of the tall pines. Muravyov's orderly, taking fire precautions, carried the pot-bellied brass samovar well back into the road, filled the pipe with pine cones and fanned the flame sedulously by using his top-boot as a bellows. Aromatic wisps of smoke drifted through the woods like the tails of paper kites. A little way off some striped mats were being aired on the thick bushes.

Tyutchev stopped and looked round.

"Sergei Ivanovich is waiting for you," said the orderly, raising his face from the samovar. "The tent opening is straight in front of you behind that old pine tree."

Tyutchev took a liking to Muravyov's camp dwelling, decorated inside with shaggy pine branches, the moment he crossed the threshold.

"Fyodor has been trying to do his best here," Muravyov said with a friendly smile, inviting his guest to sit down on an empty box covered with a gay-coloured Ukrainian rug, while he himself took a similar seat. "We shall have

some tea in a minute," he said. "Meanwhile, start your story straight away so as not to lose precious time. First of all, where did your Society get its name from—the United Slavs?"

"The name appeared during a later stage of the Society's development," said Tyutchev, and gave a brief account of how the Slav League had arisen.

The Polish revolutionary Lublinski had been brought in irons to his native town of Novograd-Volynsky, where Borisov was serving in the artillery. The event had caused a considerable stir in the little town, although the Pole was freed of his chains and allowed to stay with his mother, a poor woman who lived in a little house of her own on the outskirts of the town. Lublinski won the warm interest of the Borisov brothers and of their whole circle.

His erudition and mature revolutionary ideas astounded everyone. The idea arose of founding a secret society which would first of all do away with the discord between the fraternal Slav peoples and unite them into an all-Slav federation. That league was to stretch from the Baltic to the Adriatic, from the Black Sea to the White Sea, and each member nation was to preserve its fullest independence. The aim of the league was to establish a model state for free and happy citizens governed by just laws.

"Well, it is quite an attractive aim," Muravyov said. "And what means have you devised for attaining it?"

"That is just the trouble, we have not got it all worked out yet in practice," Tyutchev said in some embarrassment. "That is why we'd be glad if you would unite with our Society. But we have certain advantages too—I mean progress in ethical views. The emancipation of the peasants has been irrevocably decided upon and we have special rules of conduct—"

"Dreams enough and to spare, I dare say," Muravyov said with a kindly smile. "I suppose you have dragged

in all kinds of Masonic symbols, oaths, and secret signs! I hear that when the Slavs meet they press each other's palm with their thumb. Is that handshake a secret sign of recognition or does it mean something more?"

"That has gone out of use now, but still the League bears a militant character," Tyutchev explained. "The oath of loyalty is sworn by the point of the sword and not by the cross. Men swear to give all their strength and their very life for the good and freedom of their compatriots—"

"Wait a minute," Muravyov checked him. "I can see Bestuzhev through the window, hurrying here. I have invited him, too, of course—"

"And behind him marches your orderly with the blazing samovar," observed Tyutchev.

Bestuzhev allowed the orderly to pass, then entered the tent and shook hands warmly.

Muravyov set glasses out on the table and said to his orderly: "You can go now, Fyodor. Find something to do outside with the firewood or something, and mind you keep your eyes open in case anyone—"

"Don't you worry, Sergei Ivanovich," Fyodor answered cheerfully. "We've been taught to keep our eyes open."

He went out, shutting the door, but instantly reappeared at the open window and said to Bestuzhev, somewhat abashed: "You needn't look for the brandy, Mikhail Pavlovich, it's all gone."

"Not without your help, I should think," laughed Bestuzhev. The orderly disappeared.

"Have you talked many things over while I wasn't here?" Bestuzhev inquired. "One thing I'd like to know—rumour has it that the Slavs have drawn up some special rules of conduct. Will you tell us about it, Tyutchev, while I pour out the tea."

"We do have something like a catechism, or rather a substitute for it," Tyutchev answered. "The main points

of it are these: do not wish to have a slave unless you would be a slave yourself; be tolerant of all other religions. It is necessary to destroy all class and social prejudices. The main thing—and one can hardly disagree with that—is the claim that only by learning to discern the man in others can you become a man yourself.”

Sergei Muravyov got up and laid both hands on Tyutchev's shoulders.

“Tell us if you are keeping anything up your sleeve, Alexei Ivanovich,” he said earnestly. “Is there any possible obstruction to the amalgamation of our Secret Societies? Even if it is a trifle—tell us.”

“I am not so sure it is a trifle,” Tyutchev said thoughtfully. “They are such different people—your Southerners and our Slavs. Most of the Slavs are poor army officers of low rank of whom their own orderlies say: ‘My master lives only on his pay!’ We have also some commissariat officials and petty civil servants, some of them even peasants by birth.”

“And those who own villages and serfs are to give them their freedom—is that right? That is what I have been told,” said Bestuzhev.

“So far there are no obligations, but one kind and clever man—Ivan Gorbachevsky—has set others an example by giving his peasants their freedom together with all the land the moment he came into his small property. And he himself is as poor as Job, mind you.”

“This Gorbachevsky and Pyotr Borisov, I take it, form the nucleus of the Slavs?”

“They are the backbone of the whole League!” exclaimed Tyutchev. “And Pyotr Borisov has so completely dedicated himself to the revolution that this high mission has given him the moral right to dissuade his friend Gorbachevsky from marrying. That is what Borisov told him, and he repeated it to us while he was about it. It was like a commander issuing an order for a lifetime.

The gist of it was that we men, chosen by fate for a heroic deed, had to give ourselves up entirely to the people's cause. We had but one Love—the liberation of our country.”

“Is that what he said?” Bestuzhev cried, and repeated in a voice deep with emotion: “‘We have but one Love—the liberation of our country’...”

He went over to the window and became lost in thought. The soldiers' tents stood out whitely among the pines, which were still aglow with the sunset beams, and the quiet sound of singing was wafted up. The forest breathed the warmed scent of resinous pine. A narrow little boat skimmed across the lake, which was overgrown with bright-green sweet-flags.

Bestuzhev had been in a peculiar state of mind all those days. He had asked a relative to see his parents and obtain their blessing for his marriage with the girl he loved, and had received from him the sad news that his parents were dead set against such an early marriage. Instead of giving their blessing they had strictly banned the marriage and refused to apportion him any money if he insisted on having his way. And now the words Bestuzhev had just heard suggested the conclusion he was to draw for himself.

“But differences of opinion will arise between us all the same, my dear Alexei Ivanovich,” Muravyov was saying. He went up to Tyutchev, who had picked up his cap, and detained his hand in his for a minute. “I foresee differences of opinion in the mere fact that your young Slavs have become too intimate with the soldiers for one thing. I have it from trustworthy Semyonovsky men that there is a good deal of this free-speaking not only among the cannoneers, but among the rank and file, who are totally unprepared to accept our ideas. That is dangerous, and I want to speak to Borisov about it.”

The orderly came into the tent without knocking.

"Someone is coming this way, sir," he said to Muravyov. "I can see him from afar."

Tyutchev hastily took his leave. The leaders of the Vasilkov Branch shook hands with him in a friendly way.

"Please tell Gorbachevsky," said Muravyov, "that as soon as I have taken a look round this camp I will come down to make the acquaintance of the Slavs."

Muravyov regarded his forthcoming meeting with the members of the newly discovered Society so seriously that he there and then asked Bestuzhev to copy out for him the "State Covenant," which had recently been taken down from Pestel's own dictation. This was a digest of the *Russkaya Pravda's* main theses, and it was decided to familiarize the Slavs with that document before anything else was done.

CHAPTER TWO

Tyutchev's comrades jokingly called him "the match-maker" because of his persistent efforts to bring about a speedy union of the two Societies. He arranged it so that Muravyov and Bestuzhev shortly arrived in the village of Mlinishchi to make Borisov's acquaintance.

The Slavs were prejudiced against the Southerners because of their wealth and haughty airs. Being for the most part poor gunners of humble birth, they believed that those aristocratic guardsmen would look down upon them, and that Captain Tyutchev was merely a happy exception.

The Vasilkov leaders not finding the Slav leaders at home, Tyutchev undertook to bring Borisov and Gorbachevsky down to the camp to meet Muravyov-Apostol on his special invitation.

The three men rode out in the regimental britzka. It was a bright autumn day at the beginning of September,

and the air was so clear and calm that they could distinctly hear the creaking of the Ukrainian well-sweep on the edge of the village as they rode by. From one end of it dangled a bucket for drawing the water from the deeply sunk well, and the other end of the upreared pole was weighted. When the bucket was lowered the sweep made a hideous noise like someone shrieking for help.

Muravyov's tent was conspicuous from afar for the tall dahlias, which his orderly zealously watered and tended. The soldier cheerfully informed the visitors that Colonel Muravyov was waiting for them.

Muravyov received his new acquaintances with a cordiality which immediately broke down all the imaginary barriers raised by provincial pride. Borisov cast a cursory glance over the simple furnishings of the tent—the boxes covered with Ukrainian rugs and the earthen floor carpeted with striped homespun mats.

Over the wine and hors d'oeuvres, dexterously served by the orderly, the conversation at once became easy and earnest, and it was quickly brought home to everyone how badly the two Societies stood in need of each other.

Muravyov shrewdly, calmly and conclusively showed how senseless it was for the Slavs to act on their own, and pressed for immediate union. Bestuzhev-Ryumin obviously kept a check upon himself. He felt that Muravyov's calm persuasive speech would do more to convince these thoughtful self-exacting men than his impassioned eloquence, which, he knew, had such a telling effect upon the younger men.

Neither Borisov, a man of few words, nor Gorbachevsky gave any definite reply to Muravyov's proposal, saying that they had not been authorized to do so by their general meeting. They parted on the understanding that a meeting of the members of the two Societies on a broader basis would be held in the immediate future.

That meeting took place shortly afterwards in the hut

of Pyotr Borisov, who was encamped within fifteen versts of Zhitomir off the Berdichev road.

The Slavs crowded into Borisov's large room and even thronged the entry, whence the orderly had removed the hall-stand with all the clothes on it into the lumber-room. He himself stood on guard to warn the officers in case of a sudden visit by some chief or other, so as to give them time to assume the air of ordinary listeners at a lecture by Borisov, who was an expert of fortifications. Rumours about informers were already causing anxiety among the Society members, who began to take precautions to mask their meetings.

The company sat waiting a long time for Bestuzhev and Muravyov. The young officers began to fret again, and were ready to take offence at the imagined lack of consideration on the part of the guardsmen.

Borisov's hut stood aloof from the rest of the camp, and the noise of military camp life did not reach here. Cherry bushes and late-flowering asters peeped in at the low windows. The whole place was clean and tidy, although the stable and pigsty were close at hand.

"The horse is neighing peacefully, the pig is grunting—all have settled down for another thousand years to live the way their grandfathers and great-grandfathers lived before them, whilst we villains have gathered here to discuss the quickest way of blowing up this peaceful life and turning everything upside down," began Gorbachevsky.

"Well," Borisov interrupted him, "I have been preparing our men for this meeting, and I did not have to tell them anything they had not heard before. They know what it is all about, and are just dying to get going—"

"Bestuzhev is coming!" voices were raised, and the next moment reproaches were showered upon him for coming late, and annoyance was expressed at his having come alone, without Muravyov-Apostol.

Young Bestuzhev was somewhat taken aback. Never before had he faced so many listeners, all of whom had to be won over at all costs.

He apologized on Muravyov's behalf, explaining that official duties had prevented him from coming. His eyes travelled over the young faces of the gunners, and for a fleeting moment met the frank intelligent glance of Borisov and noted the hairy face of Gorbachevsky, who was twirling his moustache impatiently. He came straight to the point in an earnest tone, waiving all preliminaries:

"I have come to tell you what our aims are, I have come to propose that your Slav League should join us!"

His voice sounded more confident as he went on.

He spoke about the strength of the Southern Society, and about the participation of the Second Army, the Guards Corps and many other regiments.

He spoke of things that were and things that were not yet with such passionate yearning as if the dream of his life were already attainable.

The majority of the Slavs agreed to unite with the Southern Society soon after Bestuzhev's opening speech, and only a few isolated voices stubbornly shouted out:

"Name the chief members of the Southern Society! The members of the Secret Council!"

"We want to know more about your plans."

"What steps will be taken to introduce a constitution?"

Bestuzhev answered the questions readily enough, but bearing in mind his recent talk with Pestel he refrained from naming the members of the Secret Council so as not to be guilty of a new indiscretion.

He departed, leaving the Slavs his list of main theses from the *Russkaya Pravda* headed "The State Covenant," and by evening all the Slavs were acquainted with the proposed form of the new Russian government.

* * *

Shortly afterwards another conference was held at the lodgings of Second-Lieutenant Andreyevich, a member of the Slav League, a short thin officer with a brisk manner. He stuttered slightly and looked extremely young. Muravyov, at the last moment, had been unable to get away again, and so Bestuzhev went down with Captain Tyutchev.

He already knew his audience, and like a true orator, felt the mood of every man. His manner, now almost stern, now reproachful, now fervid and appealing, stirred all hearts, which seemed to be joined to his by invisible threads.

"For the sake of the love we bear our country," Bestuzhev said earnestly, "I appeal to you all, without further explanations—they can only give rise to new altercations and further postponement of our joint good work—I appeal to you, friends, to simply express your implicit faith in the Supreme Council and join us immediately. We cannot afford to waste time, the camp season will soon be over. Are we to part without having come to an agreement?"

His excitement, his passionate faith, communicated itself to the men, and cries of assent rose from all sides. However, some were still sceptically inclined and insisted on having the names of the Council members.

Bestuzhev did not answer their questions. It is doubtful whether he heard them in the fervour of his praise for the Southern Society. He named the various Branches that already existed and others that were planned. He named the Branches in a voice that shook with the intensity of his emotion—Kamenka, Vasilkov, Tulchin, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kiev, Vilno, Warsaw....

He said that the Council consisted of noble-minded men, who were ready to forsake wealth, honours and their career, who were prepared to die for their coun-

try, and had sworn to deliver her people from shameful slavery.

So eager was he to convince those who doubted the strength of the Southern Society, that he listed the companies and regiments that were prepared to take part in the planned rising.

"The Third Hussar Division of the Cavalry Regiment, many commanders of infantry regiments in the Third and Fourth Corps are all with us," he said enthusiastically.

Bestuzhev's words conveyed a staggering impression of the movement's vast scope. He even announced what he scarcely had any intention of announcing—that the Polish Patriotic Society with a numerous membership was ready to share with the Russians all the dangers of the rising.

The Slavs were overwhelmed by all these announcements. Few could now resist the general enthusiasm. However, Pyotr Borisov got up and said calmly:

"We must devote our lives first and foremost to liberating the Slav peoples and eradicating all enmity among them. It is a duty we must perform at all costs. Your demand that we submit to a Council whose members you refuse to name worries us. Perhaps the Southern Society considers our task—that of uniting the Slavs—an unimportant aim—"

Bestuzhev strode over to Borisov impulsively, and before he could finish what he was saying, gripped him by the shoulder.

"On the contrary!" he exclaimed. "Unity between our Societies will lead to the great Slav unity you are striving for. A reformed Russia will open the way to freedom and prosperity for all the Slav peoples."

Bestuzhev raised his right hand aloft, as though taking an oath, and went on:

"Russia, freed from tyranny, will liberate Poland, and

Bohemia, and Moravia, and all the other Slav countries. She will establish free governments there and unite them all in a federal union!"

* * *

On coming home Gorbachevsky made the following entry in his diary about that remarkable day: "Bestuzhev's enthusiasm was little short of inspiration. His confidence triumphed even over Borisov's distrust and prudence. This belief in the Southern Society's strength, this hope to see the Motherland and all other Slav countries freed during our lifetime carried everything before it. Fired by this gust of noble passion, the Slavs agreed to join the Southern Society and from this moment to consider its rules their own."

The officers met frequently and made each other's closer acquaintance. For convenience of contact intermediaries were elected.

"The spirit of the Vasilkov Branch," Gorbachevsky once said to Borisov, "has found such a response in the hearts of our young officers that I am afraid it will carry them beyond the bounds of discretion, and the small spark will blaze up into a fire."

* * *

Borisov was expecting Captain Tyutchev with Lieutenant Andreyevich, and he wanted to see his nearest friend Gorbachevsky without fail before they came.

Ivan Gorbachevsky was the son of a petty provincial official who served in the Court of Exchequer. His father, an enemy of serfdom, had brought his son up to hate it, too.

The joiner Vasili, one of Gorbachevsky's serfs who had been given their freedom, stayed with his former master and opened a joiner's shop in Gorbachevsky's modest but

roomy house. It was to this Vasili that Osip Karpenko, a former serf of the landowner Yakushkin, came to live. Karpenko started to work with his nephew in the latter's shop and proved to be an excellent joiner.

When Gorbachevsky got to know Karpenko better, he took a friendly interest in him, and planned to get him enrolled at the Kiev Arsenal as a civilian workman under the direct command of Andreyevich, who had just been appointed to that Arsenal.

Gorbachevsky went to the joiner's shop where he had a small bench of his own.

Osip and Vasili had just finished their work. A wardrobe with wood carvings stood in the middle of the workshop, as though admiring itself, and Vasili was varnishing it.

Osip Karpenko was sitting on his bench, smoking and relating something animatedly to his companion. He still wore side-whiskers, and his chin was clean shaven. The empty socket of one eye, knocked out by the French, was covered with the same black band he had worn at Yakushkin's. Both Osip and Vasili politely greeted Gorbachevsky, who, not wishing to interrupt their conversation, quietly made his way to his bench and began planing something.

"Please go on, Osip," he said, "I'd like to hear it too. What were you talking about?"

"About a landlady, sir. She lived next to us. On the painted picture she was a beauty, smelling a flower—wouldn't hurt a fly, you know. But as a matter of fact she was a terrible tyrant, a real fiend, in a word! She couldn't fall asleep of nights, so of all things she decided to have her serfs flogged outside her windows. Took it into her head that their yells would send her to sleep. And so night flogging was started. But folks were not such fools. They tricked that lady. The floggers were house serfs themselves, so the culprits came to an

arrangement with them. The moment one of them took the birch, the other was to start yelling straight away. And that's the way they worked it—the birch swished, the man yelled, and no backs were hurt. As for the lady, she got her sleeping draught."

"Ugh, I'd have given that lady a good thrashing!" Vasili said angrily, tearing himself away from what he was doing.

"Folks were up to snuff, don't you worry," the partisan said, smiling. "That landlady had the coachman's son packed off into the army before his time, and crippled his daughter with a smoothing-iron. Well, one day the lady went out for a drive in the phaeton, and the horses bolted! The coachman managed it so cleverly that he jumped clear without a scratch, but the phaeton was smashed to pieces, and all that was left of the landlady was a bag of bones."

"Serves her right," Vasili said with satisfaction.

"That's what they'll all get," echoed the partisan.

Gorbachevsky heard the story out with close attention.

Borisov's orderly, a jovial ruddy-faced soldier, came into the workshop.

"I've been looking for you, Ivan Ivanovich," he said. "My master wants you to come without delay. He's expecting Captain Tyutchev and Lieutenant Andreyevich."

"I'm coming," Gorbachevsky said, then turned to Karpenko: "Please drop in at Borisov's in an hour or so."

He strode swiftly down the forest path towards Borisov's hut and saw the host on the door-step.

"Has Tyutchev come yet?" Gorbachevsky asked.

"He should be here at any moment. He's bringing important news."

The friends went inside. Borisov handed his guest a chibouk and sat down on a camp bed, while Gorbachevsky took a seat by the window, tossed back his long hair and started to smoke.

At first sight he looked rather droll. His whiskers, moustache and long hair gave an impression of excessive hairiness, and one had to look twice at that odd countenance to discern the fine calm eyes and intelligent forehead.

"I have something important to talk over with you, Ivan," said Borisov.

"About the amalgamation with the Southern Society?" Gorbachevsky said, looking up quickly. "I've been wanting to ask you all these days, Pyotr—tell me frankly, what is it you don't like in Bestuzhev's speeches? Why are you against immediate amalgamation? Just think what a power the Southern Society is with branches scattered throughout the southern army. And all that is only part of an immense conspiracy embracing the whole of Russia and directed by the Supreme Council."

"For one thing, I don't like the way Bestuzhev jumped down my throat when I asked him whom that Council was made up of. 'The rules of the Society forbid me to disclose that,' he said. That means demanding of us submission to men we do not know. In everything else I highly approve of the Southerners. Here is proof if you like. . . ."

Borisov picked up a letter he had started to his brother Andrei and read out: "The aim of that Society is to introduce in Russia a pure democracy, doing away not only with the autocratic monarchy, but with all social estates, and merging them into a single civic estate."

"Then what more do you want of them?" Gorbachevsky exclaimed. "Have we not been groping about painfully in search of that very programme? And now that we have met the Southerners we find it ready-made. To think of all those hopes and fond dreams that were in the air after the great victories of 1812, the wild yearning after education and freedom! And what was the result? Servicemen of the new formation cropped up like poisonous

mushrooms, and drill-mania became the order of the day. The Crown Prince's paradox illustrates this well—"He is a poor soldier who lasts his term!" "

"He has expressed that in still stronger terms," Borisov said with a sad smile. "'Two killed, one drilled.' We have plenty of bullying officers, from whom you hear nothing but: 'Give him a hundred strokes, two, three hundred!' Beatings are the sole motive power that keeps the military machine going. And it was not so long ago that those soldiers came home as conquering heroes!"

They fell silent. Borisov was thinking what news Tyutchev would bring.

Gorbachevsky laid aside his dead pipe and leaned his elbows on the window-sill, gazing reflectively at the familiar little houses of the village Mlinishchi and the hill sloping down to the stream.

Borisov's orderly appeared in the doorway and announced: "Visitors to see you, sir."

Gorbachevsky ran out into the passage and embraced Tyutchev. With him were two other members of the Slav League, quite young men—Second Lieutenant of the Eighth Artillery Brigade Andreyevich, and Second Lieutenant Bechasni. The latter wore an air of importance, probably from a sense of his own responsibility—he was in charge of the soldiers' school, where, after the example of Vladimir Raevsky, he composed writing exercises with a free-thinking tendency for his pupils.

Tyutchev, an ex-Semyonovsky guardsman, was conspicuous among his unobtrusive artillery mates by a certain dandyism, and he bore himself with an air of seniority.

He walked up and down the room with a slight stoop, as though bracing himself for what was to come. At length he stopped in front of Borisov and Gorbachevsky and said:

"The camp season will soon be over. We must get together again for the last time at Andreyevich's place, and this time, without a single doubt—you and Gorbachevsky still have doubts—we must all come to an agreement about a united secret Southern Society."

Borisov looked at Gorbachevsky, who was sitting with an air of deep abstraction, and although his words were addressed to him, they were really a reply to Tyutchev's.

"We *do* have doubts, Ivan. It's quite true! After all, we swore to bring about a fraternal union of the Slav peoples—"

Andreyevich interrupted, stuttering and flushing:

"When we s-swore, we had in mind an extremely remote dream, but here we are offered a real v-vital task—that of saving our country from shame and slavery, s-saving it without delay. Why, that covers our aim as well. It's one of the tasks of the rising."

"Andreyevich is right," Gorbachevsky said. "Let us consider that point settled, Pyotr."

"Very well, but to tell you the truth I have another doubt," Borisov said in a calm confident tone. "I have been told that Muravyov-Apostol and Pestel consider our intimacy with the soldiers to be extremely dangerous. They divide the men into two classes—the 'initiated' and 'uninitiated.' They permit enlightening talks with the former, but intend to use the majority as blind followers, a herd."

Gorbachevsky drew his shaggy brows together angrily.

"I am of the same mind as you are—that it is necessary the soldier should know exactly what he is going to fight and die for!"

"I never tire of repeating to my gunners, my friends and associates," Borisov said with emphasis, "that they must make the soldiers realize they are the backbone of the whole thing."

"Rather!" exclaimed Andreyevich. "The s-soldiers are

the mainstay of the very government that tyrannizes them. If the soldiers wanted to overthrow the g-government they could do it easily."

"And thanks to the brotherly way we treat them," continued Gorbachevsky, "the soldiers of the Saratov, the Tambov and the Penza Regiments, and the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Regiments of Chasseurs, and two Artillery brigades, are at one with us."

"My friends, you are mistaken about the leaders of the Southern Society," Tyutchev said with chagrin. "They do not shun the soldiers. I know gunners whom they are enlightening with great zeal."

"But you cannot deny that Pestel does not want the spirit of liberty roused in the soldier until the eve of the rising," Borisov said sharply.

"I assure you, it is only for the sake of caution," Tyutchev said quickly. "Pestel knows how closely our movement is being watched of late. However, let us come back to the proposal of the Southern Society. Leaving differences aside for the time being—they can always be smoothed over in future—let us consider the points on which we are agreed—"

"We agree on quite a number of points," Gorbachevsky interrupted. "We both refuse to drag the yoke of dumb beasts under the whip of the autocracy. We have both decided to turn our bayonets against that diabolic rule. Then why wait, why tarry? Let us join forces and—quick march!"

"And we S-Slavs should lead the way by shouldering the b-burden," Andreyevich stuttered, "and striking the blow for our country's liberation."

"Which means going to meet death?" Borisov said, searching the faces of the men around him.

"If necessary, Pyotr, yes," Gorbachevsky said simply, voicing the sentiments of all.

* * *

The evening in Muravyov's tent a day or two before the camp broke up provided the crowning touch to all the meetings, oaths and mutual assurances of the two Societies.

This time Borisov came with the best intentions and merely wanted to ask a few more questions to clarify the rules of the Southern Society. However, his first glimpse of the Commander of the Akhtirka Regiment Artamon Muravyov, a relative of Sergei Muravyov, made him shrink inwardly with a sense of aversion. Artamon was a somewhat burly, fat-cheeked man with round glassy eyes blank of all expression. Although he was no new-fledged hussar, his swaggering attitude towards the humbler army men made him look as if he was wearing his smart uniform for the first time.

Artamon did not speak—he spewed terrible oaths, swearing that he would win Russia her freedom with his own blood. Pikhachov, the dapper Captain of the Fifth Cavalry Company, was not found wanting in enthusiasm either.

“I will allow no one to forestall me in liberating my country from the tyrant!” he shouted. “That honour belongs to my Fifth Cavalry Company. Yes, *I* will start it, I will!”

Vedenyapin, Lieutenant of the Ninth Artillery Brigade, a lean man with a pock-marked face and sardonic wit, muttered ironically: “These spurts of heroism are like short-lived rockets. Actions speak louder than words.”

But Artamon's husky voice shouted down all objections.

“In August 1826 the Emperor is going to review the troops of the Third Corps. That is when the fate of despotism will be sealed! The hated tyrant will fall under our daggers! And we shall unfurl the banner of freedom and go marching onward!”

"Moscow and Petersburg are waiting impatiently for the troops to revolt," Pikhachov confirmed, jumping up from his seat. "Our Constitution will establish perpetual prosperity for our nation, because—"

Bestuzhev checked him with a motion of his hand.

"We want the new members of our Society to know that until the Constitution receives valid force and takes root in the minds of the new citizens, the country's internal and external affairs will be handled by the so-called Provisional Government."

"For how long?" Vedenyapin asked anxiously.

"Possibly for ten years or so," Bestuzhev answered brusquely, obviously nettled by the question.

The Slavs looked startled.

"What guarantees do you offer? What is to prevent a member of the Provisional Government, elected only by the troops and supported by bayonets, from seizing autocratic power again?"

Bestuzhev flushed.

"Disgraceful thoughts!" he exclaimed, his eyes flashing. "Simply disgraceful. Are we going to tolerate a usurper, we who intend to remove the so-called lawful autocrat? Never!"

At this juncture Borisov in a calm, slightly mocking voice cited an example from history:

"Although Julius Caesar was killed amid a Rome awed by his greatness and fame, it was the faint-hearted Octavius, a youth of eighteen, who triumphed over his murderers and ardent patriots."

Bestuzhev-Ryumin stood up and began speaking with great earnestness, as though trying to ram home an incontestable truth:

"The example of Caesar being replaced by an insignificant but autocratic ruler proves how vital it is to safeguard the people's newly won rights and young liberties. For that purpose we need a steadfast, single

authority that will stand firm in the face of any discord. That authority will safeguard the new, better mode of civic existence for the people. Is it seemly, friends, to haggle over the length of office of the Provisional Government when we are entrusting the defence of the whole cause of liberty to members of our own Society, the most tried and trusted men, who are utterly devoted to that cause."

Sergei Muravyov stood up beside Bestuzhev and finished what he wanted to say in heartfelt words:

"I assure you, brothers, it is not power we are seeking, not honours or wealth—all we want is the happiness of our people. For the good of my country and her freedom I swear to lay down my life."

He held his right hand aloft and a light shone upon his face. All the others raised their hands, too.

Suddenly Bestuzhev tore off the sacred image which he wore on a chain round his neck—his cousin had embroidered it—kissed it with tears in his eyes and handed it to the others. They kissed it in turn, sealing their oath.

* * *

That day Gorbachevsky wrote in his diary: "It is impossible to describe the solemnity of that moving scene. Heartfelt, solemn, ardent oaths mingled with cries of 'Long live the Constitution! Down with the different estates! May the nobility perish together with royalty!'"

Late at night Bestuzhev finished a lengthy letter to Pestel and noticed not the guttering candle. He wrote:

"Among the new members of our Society, the affiliated Slavs, fifteen men have given their pledge that when the time comes they will strike a blow at the tyrant...."

CHAPTER THREE

The Vyatka Regiment was quartered in Lintsi, a village of the Podolsk Gubernia belonging to Prince Sanguszko. It stood in a dense forest. Commander Pestel occupied a one-storied little house in the square facing the exercise-house. To the former appointments of his Tulchin rooms were now added shelves running the whole length of the walls. They were closely lined with books, mostly on political subjects.

"The books you have only read, Pavel Ivanovich, and in all languages too!" Major Lorer used to tell Pestel with admiration. He had recently been transferred here from the St. Petersburg Guards Regiment. The estate in the Kherson Gubernia, which he had inherited, was so encumbered that it could not provide the means for continuing his service in the Guards. Obolensky, who had enrolled Lorer in the Northern Society, advised him to go direct to Pestel, whom he had sent a letter with the highest recommendations.

Pestel took an immediate liking to his new colleague, who was also his Secret Society associate. Upon closer acquaintance they became sincere friends.

Lorer's mother was Tsitsianova, a Georgian princess, and his father a Frenchman. Lorer himself was said by his friends to be a happy combination of the finest traits of both nations. A gay, sociable story-teller with a real literary gift, he possessed an ingenuous, good-natured disposition. Having learned to speak Ukrainian from his old nurse when still a child, he retained throughout his life that peculiarly soft pronunciation which lent a faintly humorous charm even to his ordinary conversation.

He knew many foreign languages, but spoke them all poorly, albeit picturesquely and adroitly. He wrote excellently, though. His stories, as yet unpublished, passed from hand to hand and excited universal approbation.

In joining the Secret Society he was animated not so much by logical revolutionary reasoning as by an ardent feeling of protest against the prevailing despotism. Lorer, to use his own words, regarded Pestel "as the most remarkable man of all times and nations," and revered his *Russkaya Pravda*, the great significance of which he fully appreciated.

Pestel was extremely gratified by this high opinion of his life work, and when he had occasion to absent himself he placed his *Russkaya Pravda* into Lorer's hands for safe custody.

"I'll look after your brain-child, take care of it like a nurse," Lorer said, his hazel eyes dancing with laughter.

"You have gay eyes, Nikolai Ivanovich," Pestel once remarked, "but strange to say they remind me of quite other eyes, rather sad ones, I should say—those of the beautiful Rosset, Pushkin's friend."

"Who, Alexandra? But she is my niece," Lorer said, obviously pleased.

Although Pestel and Lorer were on friendly terms, there was one subject of conversation between them that greatly irritated Pestel and made Lorer feel uneasy on his friend's account.

Lorer felt a strong aversion for Captain Maiboroda, whom he considered a man of mean moral fibre, and had pointed this out to Pestel more than once. Lorer knew that the Captain had been compelled to leave the Moscow Regiment for a "trick" which he had played on one of his comrades. The man had given him a thousand rubles to buy a horse for him, and Maiboroda, upon his return from leave, assured his friend that he had purchased the horse but it had died suddenly. Besides, Maiboroda treated the soldiers very roughly and dealt out harsh punishment with too generous a hand. Lorer's words of warning, however, did not put Pestel on his guard.

There was a traitor already unmasked by the members of the Secret Society—a landowner named Boshnyak, an amateur botanist whose suave manners presented a sharp contrast to Maiboroda. Probably that was why Pestel, with his natural inclination towards abstract generalizations, visualized the typical traitor as a man of Boshnyak's stamp. Maiboroda's personality, although unpleasant, did not fit in with this preconceived notion and roused no suspicion in Pestel's mind, the more so that Maiboroda made an open show of his revolutionary zeal and had only recently enrolled in the Society a man by the name of Staroselsky who, as he expressed it, was "devoted to our ideas."

When Pestel came back from St. Petersburg he tried to study Maiboroda anew with Lorer's eyes. A man of gigantic stature with a trim, albeit massive figure, Maiboroda was zealously devoted to the service and there was nothing in him to arouse suspicion. He was a narrow-minded man of primitive instincts, but this was by no means a fault, bearing in mind that Pestel intended to use him as the blind instrument of his will. Pestel definitely considered such men useful in the regiment. That was why he had asked General Kiselyov, his Chief of Staff, to transfer this Second-Captain Maiboroda to his Vyatka Regiment from the 34th Chasseurs. And Pestel, placing full trust in Maiboroda, had given him an important commission.

"You will be in camp with the men this summer, so try to work on them in our interests. It is about time!" he had said. "And report progress to me daily."

Maiboroda had looked Pestel squarely in the eyes without a trace of servility. His understanding glance expressed merely readiness to execute orders. And this disposed Pestel still more in his favour.

In August Vasili Davidov received an astounding offer from no less a person than General Count Witt, the

Governor of the military colonies in the South, asking to be enrolled in the Southern Society. Davidov had informed Pestel of this through secret channels. Lorer was sent to Tulchin to invite Yushnevsky down to discuss the matter at the general council.

Yushnevsky, Pestel's dear trusted friend and right-hand man, arrived. With him came his wife, Maria Kazimirovna, a kind-hearted woman whose charmingly gay disposition seemed to keep her in a state of perennial youth. They both put up at Pestel's little house.

Yushnevsky, Commissary-General of the Second Army, was famed for his incorruptible honesty, a quality that was extremely rare, especially among the commissary officials he happened to be serving with.

"Really, he is a white bear among the brown ones," his comrades jokingly said of him.

Yushnevsky was the oldest of the Society's members. A sturdily built, swarthy man with large bulging grey eyes, he never smiled, not even when he cracked a joke himself. He wore no beard or moustaches, and brushed his hair up and back from the temples, which made his high forehead look still higher. He was a man of grave and even temper who attracted people and, like his wife, inspired confidence.

"I'll leave you to talk over business while I go out and see the town," said Maria Kazimirovna. "So you approve my 'Polish Plan,' Alexei?"

"Yes, by all means renew your acquaintances," Yushnevsky said, and when she had gone, he started to explain to Pestel what the "Polish Plan" was, but Pestel's orderly, Stepan Savchenko, came into the room with a tray on which were an old flagon and two glasses. Yushnevsky tried the *slivyanka*,* and when the orderly had gone out, said:

* *Slivyanka*—home-made plum-liquor.—Ed.

"There are some Polish ladies in the town, Sisters of Mercy, old acquaintances of Maria Kazimirovna's. In case of need those Sisters can be a great help to us. They can smuggle anything and anybody you like across the frontier, or hide them so that no tsarist sleuth-hounds will ever find them. They hate Alexander for his duplicity and despotism, which he tries to cover up with liberal phrases."

"Do you mean to say you have taken your wife into your confidence?" Pestel said, taken aback.

"Do I look like a babbler?" Yushnevsky grumbled. "Apart from the Society's rules, which impose silence on us, I am none too eager to burden my wife with such dangerous information. Don't forget we are living on a volcano. If anything happened any they took it into their heads to interrogate her, she would really not be able to tell them anything definite. But her heart tells her a good deal."

"You are right, Alexei Petrovich, we are living on a volcano," Pestel concurred, "and may blow up at any moment. I have called you out urgently to ask your advice. Just imagine, no less a man than Count Witt is inviting himself to our Society. His letter hints at the good service he could render as a member—forty thousand bayonets! But read it yourself, here is the letter I received through Davidov."

Yushnevsky's swarthy face remained inscrutable while he was reading the letter. When he had finished, he said sternly:

"Those forty thousand bayonets spell ruin to the revolution, and are levelled at the backs of us poor sinners. Don't delude yourself, Pavel Ivanovich. This fellow hunts in couples with Boshnyak—and you know what Boshnyak is."

"A petty scoundrel, and General Witt a bigger one still," Pestel concurred. "But it is worth while trying to get hold of those forty thousand bayonets."

General Yushnevsky, always steadfast in purpose, strongly opposed Witt's proposal.

"Apart from the fact that Boshnyak is acting as go-between," he said, "who does not know how treacherous and crafty Witt is? Just now he has to give an account of several million rubles, and vindicate himself for stolen funds. So he has decided to make up to the government by betraying us, trussed hand and foot like fowl, and to win our confidence by betraying his own assistants. Read the last line again carefully, Pavel Ivanovich. Witt warns us about some traitor or other: 'I advise you to be careful—you have a traitor in your Society, one of your near associates.'"

Yushnevsky looked at Pestel searchingly and asked him point-blank:

"By the way, Pavel Ivanovich, is Maiboroda carrying out your commission or not? Has he found out what the morale is in your regiment? The soldiers' mood? Time is short, you know. What has he reported in this connection?"

"I have no reports from Maiboroda yet," Pestel answered gloomily. "He avoids me now and tries to evade the subject. To tell you the truth I have taken a sudden dislike to that Captain."

"For God's sake don't let him feel it just now. You must keep a tight hand on him. I am certain that Witt means Maiboroda when he speaks of a traitor in our midst and that he is telling the truth. I repeat, he wants to curry favour with his superiors by ruining us, and worm himself into our confidence by betraying that vile Maiboroda. I suppose Witt will lose no time in reporting to the Tsar if we reject his proposal. He merely wants to join the Society so as to have the latest information."

"We must have direct evidence against Maiboroda and not just bare suspicion," Pestel said stubbornly.

"We have it. All the evidence you want," Yushnevsky said, and drew from his pocket a leaf torn out of a note-book. "Listen to this, Pavel Ivanovich. Our man Kryukov once told me that while visiting an inn in the village of Makhnovka he passed some strong remarks about spies, and that Maiboroda, who was sitting nearby, jotted something down in his note-book with a sinister look on his face. Kryukov and his friend Cherkasov, nudging each other, decided to play a trick. They made Maiboroda drunk—he is one of those who like to eat and drink at someone else's expense—and tore this leaf out of his note-book."

Yushnevsky read out from the closely written sheet of paper: "During my stay in Makhnovka I overheard the following conversation between Kryukov the second of the Quartermaster Division and Cherkasov, which struck me as being interesting. On their way from Lintsi to Berdichev, the two officers stopped in Makhnovka and saw me at the inn where they dined. One of them, Kryukov, said this: 'You'd be surprised how widespread spying against the Society has become! Even in the Third Hussars Division there is a spy—Colonel Brink. And Colonel Abramov is always paying flying visits to Berdichev—I suppose he has agents there. That rascal Abramov ought to be put out of the way.'"

"The curious part of it," Yushnevsky said, breaking off, "is the address Maiboroda intended sending his report to. It is incredible that a traitor should be so careless. Of a truth he overdid himself." Yushnevsky pointed to a line at the bottom of the sheet written in a hasty illegible hand. However, Pestel deciphered it: "Acting with the clear conscience of a loyal subject doing his sacred duty I submit this report to the judgement of my superiors."

"I suppose this is not the only thing he has already 'submitted' about us," Yushnevsky said reproachfully.

"It is my fault!" Pestel exclaimed. "How cruelly mistaken I was. Mind you, Lorer warned me. I can't forgive myself."

He sank into a chair by the window and stared with intensity at the exercise-house with the dismal striped sentry-box, which was almost completely reflected in a huge puddle. It was raining again.

"Remorse won't mend matters, Pavel Ivanovich, so why worry," Yushnevsky said in a kindly tone, realizing how badly Pestel felt about it. "Besides, that report is nonsense, really. The whole of Russia today is talking about the Secret Societies, and they are no secret to the government. Arakcheyev has gathered all the threads long ago, and the only reason he is taking his time is because he wants to make a thorough job of it. The only really important evidence against us is your *Russkaya Pravda*. Now that can ruin you and all of us, and what is more important, our whole cause. It has to be hidden, but not in Lorer's rooms where you usually hide it—he may be arrested with the rest of us—but in a much safer place. We must bury it somewhere in the ground."

Pestel was listening attentively.

"And as for the sixth chapter concerning 'The Supreme Government,' I shall simply burn it to make doubly sure," he said. "I can always rewrite it when things take a turn for the better—and I strongly hope they will. What do you think?"

"Your 'Government' is engraved in my brain like a prayer," Yushnevsky said smiling. "We shall burn it and we shall rewrite it, you can make yourself easy on that score. But we must not put it off on any account, my dear friend."

"Kryukov may have the notes dealing with the 'Agrarian Question,'" Pestel mused aloud. "I'd like you to send for him urgently, Alexei Petrovich. How glad I am

that I can trust him. And as for you. . . ." Pestel warmly embraced his friend.

They sat down side by side on the broad sofa in silence. Pestel passed his hand across his forehead, pressing memory into service.

"I'll tell you an amusing anecdote, Alexei Petrovich. I was still an adjutant under Witgenstein at the time and our Corps was stationed in Mitau. There I made the acquaintance of eighty-year-old Count Palen, famous for the part he played in the assassination of Paul. The old man took a liking to me, and sensing in me a person inclined to free-thinking, he once warned me: 'Listen to me. If you intend doing anything by way of secret societies, that is sheer folly. I have experience, and I know men and the world. If a dozen men get together, I swear that the twelfth will be a traitor.' The old fellow's evil prophecy seems to have come true. How could I have trusted that Maiboroda? How did it happen that my usual caution deserted me? Mind you, I was the first to suspect Boshnyak when all the rest still trusted him. And here—"

Pestel sprang to his feet and darted about the room like a trapped animal.

Yushnevsky said nothing and looked sadly at his friend, who had never, not even in his presence, lost his iron self-control and given such free rein to his distress.

Maria Kazimirovna, back from her calls in town, entered the room. A glance at the faces of the two friends told her at once that something was amiss. She had heard many frightful stories about the southern military colonies and the unspeakable meanness of Count Witt, half Pole, half Greek, whom honest members of those nations refused to own as their countryman. A sudden terror assailed her at the thought that the anxious look on the faces of her husband and his friend Pestel was associated with this Governor of the southern colonies,

whose name frequently cropped up in their talk. She sat down on the sofa and said with great earnestness:

"I dare not ask you anything, still less know anything important, but believe me, I am ready to do whatever I can to help you."

"That attitude itself is the best help to us!" Pestel answered. Deeply moved, he got up and kissed both her hands.

* * *

The Yushnevskys spent several days in Lintsi. The General was more than a friend to Pestel; he was a real valuable assistant to him in his most sacred task. Pestel had considerably altered his *Russkaya Pravda*, to which he had added entirely new paragraphs, and he greatly valued Yushnevsky's criticism. Being engaged in the daytime in his regiment, Pestel spent his evenings with Yushnevsky. Stepan Savchenko understood without being told that no strangers were to be admitted to the Colonel's presence, and he guarded him with cunning good humour, inventing excuses that Pestel was ill or away on business.

"As you know, the work is planned in ten chapters," Pestel said to Yushnevsky. "I have completed the first, the second and most of the third chapters. The fourth and fifth chapters are in the rough, the remaining five merely in fragments."

Together they reread the paragraphs, made changes in the text, argued and always arrived at a common view.

They had an especially important talk on the last evening of Yushnevsky's stay in Lintsi.

Pestel was striding up and down, letting fall jerky phrases, as though dictating the results of his long meditations:

"In the first place we must bear firmly in mind that Russia does not stand in need of endless conquests of new

territories. Russia needs one thing—prosperity. Let us consider what shape this will take. The state must be composed of homogeneous and uniform parts.”

“Pavel Ivanovich,” said Yushnevsky, who was going through Pestel’s papers in a portfolio, “the basic structure of the supreme government ought to be expressed as intelligibly as possible. People want it cut and dried.”

“It is expressed clearly enough, surely,” Pestel said, punctuating his remarks by turning down his fingers. “First, legislative power—the Popular Assembly. Secondly, supreme executive power—the Council of State. The Supreme Assembly will enforce the laws. The ‘State Covenant,’ which I have dictated to Bestuzhev, stresses the all-important role of the Popular Assembly. No one can dissolve it; it is the will, the soul of the people. It alone has the power to declare war.”

“And the power to wage war belongs to the Council of State,” threw in Yushnevsky.

“Another thing I want is that people should understand what my motive was in writing the *Russkaya Pravda*,” Pestel said, and a shy look came into his face. “I shudder at the thought that despite the revolution that occurred in France in 1789 and all the blood shed, the French people have fallen under the yoke again. And so, to avoid anything like that happening here, the moment the idea of a republic took shape in my mind, I sat down to write my *Russkaya Pravda* in order to prevent sanguinary internecine war and arbitrary seizure of power. We must not only change the old order of things for a better, but make sure at the very outset that it has something to lean on.”

“I envy you,” said Yushnevsky. “You believe in the power of ideas as you would in God.”

“I do,” Pestel answered firmly. “If they work for the good of the people and the country, they are like a granite rock—the foundation of the whole edifice.”

"You are quite right, and I believe now that the republic is the only proper form of state organization and the nation's salvation. The recent events in Spain, Naples and Portugal confirm it. How suddenly the constitution was granted there, and how quickly it collapsed. Yes, as soon as the people began to believe the tyrant and no longer threatened to overthrow him! The royal perjurers have yoked the people again more securely than ever. But to believe, as you do, in the logical power of reason to such an extent as to consider it alone capable of holding in leash all passions and human folly—that, I am sorry to say, is beyond me."

Savchenko gave the prearranged signal—a tap on the door—announcing the arrival of a member of the Society. Lorer came in. Yushnevsky and Pestel were very glad to see him.

"You are just in time, Nikolai Ivanovich," Pestel said. "We want to settle one or two things here. We have no secrets from you. You have come from Vasilkov, how are things there?"

"Bestuzhev has written you. A union has been effected with the Slavs—they have turned out to be capital fellows," Lorer said cheerfully. "Bestuzhev's idea is to form a party of 'executive conspirators' out of them, and they are only too eager to sign their names. Bestuzhev asks you to enlist some determined officers here to reinforce those ardent Slavs. Our affairs seem to be making headway."

"The ardour of the Vasilkov Branch worries me," said Yushnevsky. "Fortified by the Slavs, it may act imprudently and ruin all our plans. We must work together under a single leadership."

"I have been thinking about that," said Pestel, "and I suggest that Sergei Muravyov be included as a member of the Directorate."

"It is essential that you should start the rising. You have the *Russkaya Pravda* in your hands!" exclaimed Lorer. "By what other means are we going to hold the power? As for the rest, everything is now in order: the Northern Society, of course, will join the movement with the Southern. The hardest and longest resistance to our plans came from Trubetskoy and his followers, but he has gone to St. Petersburg, taking with him the resolution of the Southern Society to start action in 1826."

"We have enough forces to start with," said Pestel. "Together with the Vasilkov Branch and the Slavs, and with the support of the Semyonovsky soldiers, not to mention the Northerners, we shall achieve complete victory. I agree with you, Lorer, that the rising should start with us, when my Vyatka Regiment goes on guard on the 1st of January. I have already asked Kryukov the second to tell the members serving in the Quartermaster Division to get their army uniforms ready. The Vyatka Regiment will have to enter Headquarters and immediately arrest the Commander-in-Chief and the Chief of Staff. We shall give orders through Zaikin that no one is to be allowed to leave Headquarters."

Pestel paused for a minute, his eye travelling from Yushnevsky to Lorer, then he added with a frown, thinking of Maiboroda: "But this plan, my friends, will have to be kept a profound secret. There are too many traitors. . . ."

Lorer caught hold of Pestel's sleeve.

"Colonel Yentaltsev, as you have decided, has been ordered to hold his company in readiness from the beginning of December. Volkonsky will come out with the troops which he is able to rouse at once. Davidov will join him, and together they will pay the military colonies a surprise visit. I can imagine the splendid reception they will be given there."

"One thing, Lorer, we have to keep well in mind," Yushnevsky interrupted. "Unless the theses of Pavel

Ivanovich's *Russkaya Pravda* are applied immediately after the rising, all the bloodshed, all the sacrifices and trouble will have been in vain."

"It grieves me," Pestel said, "that some members of the Northern Society still fail to grasp the full implications of my *Russkaya Pravda*."

"And you thought that in order to bring home to people the truth all you had to give them was logical arguments, the force of your mind alone?"

"My work has been written for the good of all," Pestel said with modest dignity, "and I certainly have no right to change anything in deference to those who do not understand our real tasks."

"Not a word should be changed, not a letter," Lorer broke in warmly. "Your *Russkaya Pravda* is for the good of all people. And I have a feeling that posterity will appreciate in it those very things which are now beyond our contemporaries. You have been the first to lay down in a constitutional law what is essential for the good of man. You have declared that the peasants should be freed from slavery not with a beggar's sack but with land. And that will live to your credit throughout the ages."

"Come, Lorer, that's rather a high note you've taken," Pestel said, smiling.

"Would you have me take a low one then, together with Matvei Muravyov?"

"That's interesting," said Yushnevsky, filling his pipe. "What are Matvei's views, by the way?"

"Oh," Lorer said petulantly, "he calls the *Russkaya Pravda* names, says it is a hy-po-the-sis!"

Pestel and Yushnevsky burst out laughing.

"No, really, he does. God only knows, he says, whether that hypothesis is workable or not. As for the 'division of the land,' he gnashes his teeth—"

"Who cares," Yushnevsky said with a gesture of dismissal.

"There are other opinions, Pavel Ivanovich, more appreciative than that. Don't you remember what Lunin once told you?"

"Indeed I do," Pestel said, beaming.

"After reading your manuscript, he said: 'Guard it as you would the apple of your eye. Our government would give anything to discover the *Russkaya Pravda* and bury it in the dust of the archives.' He knew its real worth!"

"There's a man I should like to see with us now!" Pestel exclaimed. "Lunin is a man of action, not of words. But, like Chaadayev, he had no chance under Russian conditions of applying his political gifts and statesmanship, and he just wasted himself on trifles."

"Yes, but how brilliantly!" Yushnevsky interrupted. "To be sure, that was in his rollicking youth, when he and Volkonsky, both young Cavalier Gardes, were stationed at Chornaya Rechka and struck terror into the police with their tame bears. During the hot Peterhof summer their commander forbade them to go swimming in the sea, as he thought it improper for guardsmen to expose their bodies to the public view. One day, seeing the commander's barouche, Lunin plunged into the water just as he was, in full dress uniform with shako and Hessian boots. He reported audaciously: 'I am bathing according to Your Excellency's order concerning the proprieties.'"

"I liked his answer to the Tsar, too," said Pestel. "When, after one of Lunin's usual pranks, Alexander met him in public, he muttered haughtily: 'I hear it said of you, Lunin, that you are out of your mind.'"

Yushnevsky finished the story with a laugh: "And Lunin retorted sharply: 'That is what they said about Columbus, too.' When he tendered his resignation to go abroad, Alexander signed it with pleasure, saying: 'Now that is the best thing Lunin could have thought of,'"

"Our Tsar does not like men who are too clever," Pestel said ironically. "No wonder Pushkin wrote of another one of them, Chaadayev: 'In Rome he would have been a Brutus, in Athens a Pericles, but with us he is an officer of the Hussars.'"

They were silent a while, each engrossed in his own thoughts.

"My dear friends," Pestel said suddenly. "Our 'Sovereign, weak and crafty,' stands at the head of all the dark forces hostile to the spirit of freedom and the weal of the peoples. Let us pledge our word then, that in the event of our great cause succeeding we shall do everything in our power to ensure that the new Russia will stand at the head of all intelligent humanity."

CHAPTER FOUR

In the middle of November Pestel concealed his papers. He burnt the sixth chapter, the most dangerous part of his work concerning the "Supreme Government." The rest of the manuscript, together with Baryatinsky's verses and Kryukov the second's notes "On the Agrarian Question," carefully wrapped up and sewn in a large packet, was buried in the ground.

Anxious days set in. Treachery was suspected and there was a feeling in the air that the government was hatching some scheme.

Pestel withdrew into himself still more. Sitting with Lorer in his study, he lapsed into long silences and did not even tell Savchenko to light the candles. And one evening, oddly in keeping with this mood of his, a man suddenly appeared in this semi-gloom with a note from Sergei Muravyov, saying: "The Society is discovered. If a single member is arrested I shall set the ball in motion." The next day the Tulchin Branch was agog with

excitement; the traitor's name was in everyone's mouth, and Lorer was ruefully obliged to admit that his presentiment had been right—the traitor's name was Maiboroda.

The members of the Secret Society did not lose heart, however. They placed their hopes on Alexander's habitual indecision, and did not think he would take any drastic measures, the more so that no action had yet been taken in connection with Sherwood's denunciation.

Sherwood, an N.C.O. of the Ukrainian Regiment and an Englishman by birth, had wormed himself into the confidence of that impulsive man Fyodor Vadkovsky, whose importance for the Secret Society Pestel rated so highly that he considered him one of the leaders of the youth group which he had organized in St. Petersburg.

"I live and breathe only for the sacred purpose that unites us," Vadkovsky wrote to Pestel. This ardour, however, caused mischief both to himself and to all his Secret Society associates.

Sherwood stole a list of Secret Society members out of the violin case in which Vadkovsky kept his secret documents, and forwarded a copy of it to the Tsar through Arakcheyev. Sherwood's persistence obtained him a personal audience, but Alexander referred him back to Arakcheyev, who was to devise some further line of action in regard to the conspirators. The Tsar himself hastily left for Taganrog.

It was rumoured that Alexander had summoned Count Witt, the Governor of the military colonies, and severely reprimanded him.

"What are you thinking of? Everywhere there are plots and secret societies, and you know nothing about it!"

Witt answered that he knew a good deal. He ran over the names of the principal conspirators, which coincided with the list Sherwood had reported, declaring Pestel to be the central figure. He accounted for the delay in bring-

ing this to His Majesty's notice by a desire to collect all the clues he could.

On what scale arrests and reprisals would have followed it is difficult to say, for unforeseen events took place in the country.

Alexander left for Taganrog, escorting his sick wife.

In his eagerness to quit the capital he was like a petty clerk who had received a long holiday and was anxious to get away and dismiss all business cares from his mind.

And now, when this most troublesome of all cares—Maiboroda's new detailed report concerning the Secret Society—had overtaken him here while on his holiday, he urgently summoned his "devoted, not servile" confidant.

Arakcheyev was staying at his Novgorod estate of Gruzino, where he had abandoned himself to an excess of grief, his menials having murdered his beloved Nastasia Minkina, who was famous for her cruelty.

The Tsar wrote Arakcheyev a long letter and sent a secret message to Archimandrite Photius to make sure of his coming, but it was of no avail. Arakcheyev did not stir from Gruzino, where he was trying to discover the name of Minkina's murderer by inflicting horrible tortures upon almost all his menials.

Disturbed by the conduct of his "dearest friend" and the impending necessity of dealing with these depressing affairs himself, Alexander took a short trip through the southern coast of the Crimea as a tonic for his nerves.

The Tsar returned to Taganrog an utterly sick man. His doctors and the Tsaritsa wrote the Empress Mother Maria Feodorovna in St. Petersburg that he was laid low by a severe Crimean fever. Then, for a brief space, Alexander's condition improved, but this turned out to be merely the crisis of a fatal disease.

By the time the news of the Tsar's improved condition, delayed by the execrable state of the roads and the

long distance, at last reached the capital, his body, unskillfully embalmed, had been lying on the table for several days.

While the public prayer of thanksgiving for Alexander's health was being held in St. Petersburg a courier arrived with the news of his death, and Grand Duke Nicholas, without a moment's delay, ordered the prayer to be superseded by a mass for the dead. The frightened court priest, who had just been chanting hallelujah at the top of his voice, had to perform the office of the dead almost in the same breath.

The Tsar died on November 19th, but it was not until November 28, 1825, that the *Severnaya Pchela* announced the fact all across the home news pages:

"A courier, arrived from Taganrog on November 27th, has brought the sorrowful news of the death of His Majesty the Emperor Alexander Pavlovich."

Immediately upon receiving this distressing news the members of the imperial family, the Council of State and the ministers gathered in the palace, where "His Highness the Grand Duke Nicholas Pavlovich," and after him, all the government officers, took the oath of allegiance to "His Imperial Majesty the Emperor Constantine the First."

And at once the portraits of the snub-nosed, fierce-eyed Constantine—almost a copy of Paul—appeared in the windows of the art shops. Next to them, as though by accident, were exhibited the portraits of the leaders of the Spanish revolution—General Quiroga and Rafael Riego.

Long before he had had any thoughts of the crown, Nicholas was disturbed by a strange utterance on the part of the notorious "prophetess" Baroness Krüdener. Piercing the Grand Duke with her wild eyes burning with a fanaticism that was reported to have gained her at one time complete influence over the Emperor Alexan-

der, the court "prophetess" had uttered solemnly: "Gird up thy loins. Expect a sign from Heaven."

The baroness knew what she was talking about. Her intimacy with Alexander had given her information that was withheld from everyone else. She knew about the Tsar's feeble health and his manifesto, as yet unknown even to Nicholas, by which the latter succeeded to the crown over the head of his elder brother Constantine.

Nicholas, concealing his thoughts from everyone with habitual secretiveness, had been waiting for "the sign from Heaven" ever since that memorable day in 1819 when Alexander, more than usually pleased with him in his capacity of brigade commander, had called without ceremony to have dinner with him.

"I am doubly pleased with your military successes," Alexander had said to his brother with that sweet smile which had earned him the title of "the angel" both in the family and at court. "I regard you as my successor. Constantine, you know, has formally renounced his claim."

It was common knowledge that the Crown Prince Constantine soon after March 11* had said to General Sablukov, Paul's faithful follower: "A fine mess it was! After what has happened my brother may reign if he wants, but I beg to be excused."

Later he said to Michael: "Luckily, I am married not to a princess but an ordinary mortal, and a Pole into the bargain. I cede the throne to Nicholas."

In 1822 Constantine wrote a letter to Alexander, renouncing his claim to the throne. Within a month came the reply: "In deference to the reasons given by you I give you complete freedom to follow your own inclinations."

Finally, in 1823, Alexander vested this domestic act of abdication with the force of law. Philaret, the Metropoli-

* Paul I was assassinated on March 11, 1801.—*Ed.*

tan of Moscow, was charged to draw up the draft of a manifesto, which the Tsar signed at Tsarskoye Selo. The manifesto at last declared the name of the successor: "Our second brother Nicholas shall be our successor."

One would think, what could be more natural than publishing that manifesto, so as to get the public used to hearing Nicholas's name mentioned as successor in the church services and thus ensure his peaceful ascension to the throne when the time came for it.

Alexander, however, did just the opposite. The manifesto was ordered to be kept in great secrecy in the Cathedral of the Assumption in Moscow. A copy was made for St. Petersburg by Golitsin, on which Alexander wrote: "To be kept in the Council of State."

And so, the document that was to define Nicholas's position after the death of Alexander was kept in secret in the two capitals.

The statesmen, among them Admiral Shishkov, averred that such a vast empire could not exist an hour without an emperor, and after the death of Alexander, Nicholas immediately took the oath to Constantine, whom he regarded as the legitimate heir to the throne by right of seniority.

The interregnum and the events attending it were due to the fact that the manifesto naming Nicholas the heir to the throne had been kept a secret. What aim did Alexander pursue in resorting to this stratagem? He may have suspected that Constantine, despite his ostensibly voluntary abdication, had not altogether given up the idea of sitting upon the Russian throne. And so long as Constantine controlled the Polish army and the Lithuanian Corps, the publication of the manifesto seemed to Alexander to be fraught with some risk.

Nicholas had won the admiration of the Prussian court by his talents for military drill, and of all Europe by his huge stature and the almost classical regularity of his

"Apollonian" features, which, to a Russian eye, were expressionless. To be sure, some people added mockingly, "Apollo with a toothache," having in mind his fattish cheeks.

Alexander had kept his brother Nicholas in the rank of brigade commander for quite a time, and it was not until the eve of his departure for Taganrog that he had promoted him to the command of a division. Nicholas's brilliant display of manual exercises and masterly beating of drums at the Bobruisk manoeuvres made such an impression upon his contemporaries that the latter placed this gift of his on record for posterity.

Scarcely had Nicholas taken the oath to Constantine when his mother, Maria Feodorovna, showered him with reproaches, and Golitsin, sobbing, exclaimed: "What have you done! Under the Will of the late Emperor *you* are the heir to the throne. There is a manifesto confirming it—"

"Which neither I nor the people know of," Nicholas was quick to answer.

And there began what contemporaries had called "playing shuttlecock with the crown." Indeed, the House of Romanovs treated the heritage of the Russian throne as if it were their private property.

Constantine was entreated to come and publicly announce his abdication or set forth in official terms his former decision confirming the manifesto of the late emperor.

But Constantine did not stir from Warsaw and merely sent indecorous letters whose contents could not be made public. He derived a malicious satisfaction from the situation, thinking: you have got into a mess, now get out of it yourselves!

Meanwhile time was passing. One day Nicholas was awakened at six in the morning to receive an "extra urgent" packet from the Chief of Staff, General Dibich, from

Taganrog. A similar packet had been sent to Warsaw, as no one in Taganrog knew who the new Tsar was and where he resided. After opening the packet Nicholas made the following entry in his diary: "It was about the existence of a newly discovered conspiracy with ramifications throughout the empire, from St. Petersburg to Moscow and down to the Second Army in Bessarabia."

Nicholas sent for General Voinov, who commanded the Guards, and ordered him to assemble all the Generals and regimental commanders at the palace on Monday, December 13.

"I want to explain to them in person the whole course of events in our family," he said, "and charge them to make this clear to their subordinates, so that there should be no grounds for any disturbances." He still considered the question of the succession to be a private family affair.

Before his death, however, Alexander had commissioned Adjutant-General Chernishov to investigate the affair of the Secret Society and arrest the ringleaders indicated by the traitors.

Adjutant-General Chernishov arrived at Tulchin.

He announced to the Commander-in-Chief with his customary aplomb that he intended to make a round of the army regiments in order to arrest all the members of the Secret Society of whom he had a list. However, Count Witgenstein, an enlightened man whose son was closely connected with the Secret Society, vigorously suppressed the General's official zeal by declaring that he would have to produce an Imperial Injunction before he could take such action.

"What is more," he added with a subtle smile, "I rather fear that the troops, shocked by the mass arrests of their favourite officers, will arrest you!"

His plan frustrated, Chernishov ordered all the regimental commanders to be mustered in Tulchin.

Pestel did not want to go. He was about to have General Kiselyov, the Chief of Staff, informed that he had suddenly fallen ill, but he changed his mind overnight.

At daybreak he sent his orderly for Lorer, asking him to come at once.

Pestel's travelling carriage stood outside his house, ready to start. Pestel received Lorer with his usual calmness and ushered him into the study.

"I am going to Tulchin," he said. "Let come what may. I wanted to see you again before going. Let us sit down."

They sat down on the sofa before the table where they had so often confided to each other their cherished thoughts. Just now uncertainty oppressed them and painful misgivings made their hearts sink.

"Are we to lay down our arms without a fight?" Lorer thought, and continuing his thoughts aloud, he said:

"If I am not mistaken, Pavel Ivanovich, Colonel Yentaltsev has been keeping his Horse-Artillery Company in readiness since the beginning of December...."

"You forget that it was not intended to start the rising until January 1826," Pestel interrupted him, guessing his drift. "That was when my Vyatka Regiment was to take up guard duties, as you know. Volkonsky would have had time then to prepare his whole brigade, and of course Yentaltsev's company could have made a dash for the military colonies, where feeling is running very high. You and I would not be idle either. But now none of these commanders will be able to move a step."

"We're trapped," Lorer said bitterly. "The Tsar has spiked our guns. Even dead, he is working mischief."

"Yes," Pestel said, "and therefore, if disaster overtakes us now, it were better to fall a victim ourselves than to start useless bloodshed. I am happy in the knowledge that my *Pravda* will survive and do its work—"

"And outlive us all," Lorer wound up with deep conviction.

The two comrades warmly embraced each other, and Pestel rode away. Lorer lingered on the porch, gazing down the road, where the carriage had long vanished from sight, then, instead of going home, he directed his steps towards the oak wood outside the town. He recalled that Pestel these last few days had been more than usually considerate towards his friends. There had emanated from him an aura of calm courage that seemed to galvanize everyone around him. Although chary of confidences, he had spoken about an incident in his early youth, which now struck Lorer rather forcibly. Pestel's father, in sending him and his brother Vladimir to Dresden to be educated, had booked two berths for the boys in Kronstadt on a merchantman. When everything was ready for the boys to leave and they had said good-bye to their father, the latter, for some unaccountable reason, had suddenly decided not to let the boys go on that vessel. The boys obeyed their father although they were no little surprised at his sudden caprice. Great was their astonishment, when, upon arriving safely in Dresden, the brothers learned that the ship they were to have sailed in never reached her destination and had gone down with all her passengers. When he finished the story, Pestel had added with a smile: "The proverb truly says: 'He that is born to be hanged shall never be drowned.' I certainly did escape drowning."

A sense of desolation assailed Lorer. He roamed about the woods until he was chilled to the marrow. He came home late at night and slept like the dead.

The next day Lorer was told that Stepan Savchenko, Pestel's orderly, who had accompanied his master to Tulchin, had been brought back in irons.

As acting commander of the Vyatka Regiment, Lorer had the right to visit the prisoner.

"What have they done to Pavel Ivanovich?" he asked the sobbing Savchenko.

"He's under a strong guard, my master is. They've put him behind bars in the monastery prison that stands on the hill. There's no escape for him."

Events developed in the following order.

The Commander-in-Chief, Count Witgenstein, issued the following order to Baikov, the duty officer of the Second Army:

"As soon as Colonel Pestel arrives at the outpost have him taken straight to your house and tell him in my name that he is placed under arrest and is to remain in custody until further notice."

Baikov promptly executed the order and reported to the Count:

"By leave and order of Your Excellency I posted a gendarme at the turnpike with a letter to Pestel, requesting him to drive straight to my rooms to receive orders. When all the persons who were at my place had withdrawn I told Pestel he was arrested. I gave him one of my rooms, over which I set a guard with instructions to admit no one except Your Excellency. Furthermore, my lodgings were under the secret surveillance of the military police. But as the room in question was not prepared and not even heated, as the cold weather and his health required, he spent the whole day in my room. After a while Major-General Prince Volkonsky, in full dress uniform, entered the room in which Pestel and I were sitting, and in answer to my question said that he had come on official business."

As a matter of fact Volkonsky had taken in the situation at a glance and did not ask Pestel questions of any import in Baikov's presence. Baikov being compelled to leave the room on some urgent business, the two were left together for a brief time, and Volkonsky said to Pestel in French: "Courage!"—to which he received the cool reply: "I have courage enough. Burn all the papers per-

taining to my *Pravda* at once. There is bound to be a search at your place."

The first thought of Alexander Poggio, member of the Southern Society, who happened to be in Tulchin at the moment, was to set all available forces in motion to secure Pestel's release. The plans for the rising of Volkonsky's division and the proposed seizure of Headquarters by the Vyatka Regiment had been known to him since 1824. "Why could not that plan be executed now?" he thought.

Through Yentaltsev, Poggio sent Volkonsky a letter containing the desperate words: "If the Society is discovered, ruin is inevitable. Execution awaits us all, no mercy will be shown."

Poggio urged and pleaded that Pestel should be rescued. He referred to the 1826 plan, which was known to him. He quoted Pestel's own words, which he remembered by heart: "Go into action with the regiments of the Nineteenth Infantry Division. Volkonsky's presence is enough to win over the regiment of the First Brigade, after which the others will follow suit. Make an attack upon Tulchin. Arrest the leadership of the Second Army."

First of all Poggio wanted to ascertain the attitude of the Kamenka Branch to the rising. According to Pestel's plan Davidov, the head of the Kamenka Branch, was given wide scope of action in the military colonies, but Poggio came up against Davidov's utter helplessness and faint-heartedness.

"You've got it mixed up," the latter said. "Pestel's revolutionary plan was based upon St. Petersburg. That is where the thing was to start. All we could do here was to support it. Besides, Volkonsky by himself counts for nothing. Pestel's the only man who could have headed the rising. If Pestel were here it would be quite a different thing."

Poggio urged Davidov to go with him to see Volkonsky, and to let Sergei Muravyov know of the decision to start the rising. Davidov, by this time utterly bewildered, re-

jected all proposals. From Volkonsky, who was staying with his family in Uman, there came a letter saying that he could start no rising without Pestel. In fact, he was arrested himself almost immediately after Pestel, together with Baryatinsky, Yushnevsky and Kryukov the second. The Tulchin Directorate ceased to exist.

* * *

Tulchin, a town in Podolia belonging to Count Potocki, passed over to Russia after the second division of Poland. In the centre of the town rose Potocki's sumptuous palace with a white Ionic colonnade, built by the architect Lacroix. The palace stood in a broad park. On the hill-sides, beyond the bounds of the Count's estate, lay huddled the mean huts of the townsfolk. Above, on a hill, towered the ancient Catholic monastery of the Bernardine Order containing a strong prison.

Pestel was confined in a solitary cell from the day he was arrested until he was sent to St. Petersburg where, on January 3rd, he was to appear before Nicholas in his palace. During those three weeks Pestel had ample time to think.

He knew that Maiboroda had handed in his report, in which, of course, he had mentioned the fact that Pestel's papers had been concealed. Pestel understood that the *Russkaya Pravda* would be the chief item of the accusation and that the interrogations would be extremely harsh.

Preparations for the rising of 1826 organized by Pestel had begun in the summer of 1825. They were carried out in complete secrecy, for Boshnyak's treachery was no longer doubted, Maiboroda was suspected and rumours were afloat that N.C.O. Sherwood had already made his report to the Tsar.

Lunin's words concerning the *Russkaya Pravda* came back to him again: "Guard it as you would the apple of

your eye. Our government would give anything to discover it."

Savchenko and Zaikin, with Lorer's help, had packed up his papers during the night and taken them away. What had happened to them since, Pestel did not know. They may have been discovered for all he knew.

He went over the principal theses of his *Russkaya Pravda* again and again, as though preparing to plead his cause. The struggle against tsarism had taken its rise from the struggle against serfdom. People had to be taught to fight. And the *Russkaya Pravda* was the path by which that victory over the empire of violence and tyranny was to be achieved.

Lunin rose vividly before him, saying with his ironic smile: "Pestel wants to write an encyclopedia first and make the revolution afterwards. Why, two lives would not suffice for such a task."

There he had been mistaken. One life had sufficed, and a very short one at that, to say what needed saying and do what needed doing in order to liberate the people.

"Given a little more time," thought Pestel, "everyone would have come to realize this. What a tremendous force they would have made!"

The *Russkaya Pravda* adopted in 1823 had been the first version. The second, truly revolutionary version, had not yet found ultimate expression. It was still ripening. Pestel had not had time to finish all the ten chapters of the Constitution as he had planned to do.

He had worked on it every spare minute, had sacrificed his happiness to this task, and suppressed every desire to enjoy the pleasures of life which his position in society, his youth and talent offered him.

Pacing up and down before the barred window of his cell for days on end, Pestel mentally analyzed his work, summed up his career. "Ah, well," he thought proudly, "I have nothing to regret."

Previously, when he had still believed in a constitutional monarchy, he had shrunk from the thought of radical changes in the tenor of life, but his mind, having begun to work, pursued this train of thought to its ultimate and logical conclusion. Having come to accept the republic as an aim, he was not to be shaken in his faith and loyalty to that idea. What was the point of departure in Pestel's creed? What was the vital principle upon which it rested? Just this—the essential nature of man himself. In this alone did he seek the source of his duties and his rights. He firmly believed that the object of society was the welfare of all and each of its members. Therefore the chief purpose of the *Russkaya Pravda* was to establish the state upon a sound basis. The people was no one's property. The people was to constitute a well-ordered society.

Rejecting the principles of class privileges and property distinctions, Pestel held political equality to be the true ideal, with every citizen having an equal say in the system of state administration. And that was why he called his work the *Russian Right*.

"But what a storm of protest the thesis of the *Russkaya Pravda* that all social estates should be abolished will rouse among the nobility! That all persons in the country should have equal civil rights! That all citizens should be equal before the law!"

Pestel restlessly paced his narrow cell, every now and then forgetting himself and voicing his thoughts aloud. Catching himself, he would glance at the door.

"Yes, there is no hint of privileges for the nobility in the latest version of the *Pravda*. None whatever, although they may have earned them by their service to the country. I had once thought of preserving them. But now I emphatically insist that all social estates must be done away with. All without exception!"

* * *

The low cell with its thick walls was dank and chilly like a burial vault.

Through the wrought-iron grating Pestel could see the town's outskirts below with their white little houses tenanted by the poor Polish gentry and Jews. Farther out lay the hills, fields and woods.

The sky was blue and frosty. The sun gave the poor little town a festive appearance, and the snow-powdered poplars looked like minarets of an Eastern town. The children, jostling one another amid loud laughter, slid down the long hill-side in a frozen box which looked like a block of ice, played snowballs and tumbled about in the snow.

Pestel could not tear his eyes away from them. How passionately he desired not only prosperity and freedom but simple human joys for all those poverty-stricken people! How great had been his hopes that communal use of the land would unite the rural inhabitants closer than ever before. Under such a system of public tenure the land would become a source of vital common interests, would be like a mother, uniting all her children into a single close-knit family. And the taking of the oath to their country by minors who had reached the age of fifteen would become a new holiday, the first really civic solemnity. This ceremony of admission to citizenship was to be arranged with special care. "For our free and happy youths we must celebrate 'Citizen's Day' with pomp and splendour, so that they will remember it for years to come!"

Forgetting himself, Pestel strode up to the door and pulled it. The massive door was securely locked. Through the barred window he could see the guards' bayonets.

Pestel sank wearily onto the wretched cot. The sharp pain in his leg, which had been fractured at Borodino, made him cease his pacing. But thoughts thronged in his mind, and his brain went on with its work, explaining to

his judges, to himself or perhaps to future generations the meaning of this tremendous task of his lifetime.

"My *Russkaya Pravda* has two aspects. Will they understand that? One aspect, familiar to the Southern Society, is the earliest draft constitution. The other is that final thought-out version, which has been ripening steadily since 1824. This last, far more daring version, is evidently destined to remain known only to myself and a few of my friends," Pestel thought sadly, but the next moment his face cleared at the gratifying thought that he had managed after all to dictate to Bestuzhev his "State Covenant," containing at least the basic theses of a republic and civil equality. "The Southerners and their Slav allies have mastered those theses. Someone is sure to preserve them. The idea is now enshrined in men's thoughts, where it will live a life of its own."

At night his head ached. The dampness became more oppressive than in the daytime. His thoughts refused to obey him. Images rose before him unbidden. The Chief of Staff, General Kiselyov, with his predilection for free-thinking, was sitting in his study, listening attentively to fragments from the *Russkaya Pravda*, now and again nodding approval and exclaiming slyly: "O, Machiavelli!" Had he ever thought he would be obliged so soon to make a humiliating search of the rooms of the author he so greatly admired, to rummage about in the drawers of his writing-table and dig up the garden in search of the manuscript he knew so well?

"You will find nothing, General," Pestel found himself thinking with a smile. "Everything has been burnt or buried in the ground, everything except perhaps private letters, among which is one of your own, a very friendly letter containing the following lines: 'You have a powerful mind, Machiavelli, and every opportunity of making

good use of it—marry and retire to live a contemplative life.' ”

Would not such a letter from a Chief of Staff, exceeding the bounds of ordinary formality, sound strange to a suspicious reader? Especially if it came to light that the General who wrote it was a would-be candidate for a high place in the new republican government.

Pestel's hours of sleep were brief and fitful. Once he dreamt of the long-forgotten Corps of Pages and of himself as a Page of the Chamber in a gold-trimmed uniform. His name and the date of graduation were being inscribed in gold letters on the marble roll of honour.

He awoke to the realization that this great honour was no dream. He had really had his name inscribed in gold after the examinations held in the Tsar's presence in 1811. He had been first on the list to pass the examinations. Suddenly he recollected that Alexander Radishchev, too, had been a Page and studied in the same military school for noblemen.

Doubtlessly it had been the same painful experience of court life that had roused in both of them their first protest against inequality.

“In its thirst for revenge, the government, of course, will now smash that marble with my name on it,” thought Pestel ironically. “Let them smash it.”

He rose and went over to the window. The cold moon could be seen between the bars, and a glint of the guards' bayonets.

“Radishchev was sentenced to death. Why? For his daring ideas. But can ideas be kept in chains? Half a century has gone by, and Radishchev's ideas are as alive as ever. My *Russkaya Pravda* is as dangerous to the Tsar and his government as Radishchev's *Journey* was to Catherine.”

* * *

And all through the weary days of his solitude the anxious thought preyed on Pestel's mind: "What is happening in St. Petersburg? How is Sergei Muravyov, Bestuzhev? How are my comrades?"

CHAPTER FIVE

What was happening in the Secret Society during those closing months of 1825?

Nikita Muravyov took protracted leave and went to his Oryol estate with his wife. Rileyev's closest assistants were now Nikolai Bestuzhev, Obolensky and Alexander Bestuzhev. The latter had been publishing the almanac *Polyarnaya Zvezda* for several years now in co-operation with Rileyev.

The numerous Muravyovs were related to one another in a near or remote degree. Bestuzhev-Ryumin, however, was not related to the four Bestuzhev brothers, all members of the Northern Society, and merely bore the same name. Those two old Russian families played an important part in the conspiracies of the North and South.

The second of the Bestuzhevs—Alexander—a brilliant guardsman, adjutant to the Duke of Württemberg, made a name for himself in Russian literature under the pseudonym of Marlinsky, despite his numerous military duties.

He chose that name because at the time he first got into print his regiment was stationed in Peterhof and he himself lived in Marli.

Alexander Bestuzhev wore a handsome uniform and lived the life of a successful man about town, with love affairs and duels. Nevertheless he found time to spare for serious study, edited his almanac with enthusiasm and took no little pains to create a literary style of lan-

guage as elegant and lively as he was himself. Besides being richly endowed by nature, he overflowed with the vitality of youth, and held social views that placed him on a level with the leading members of the Secret Society. He burst easily into a cascade of freedom-loving speeches, and scathingly censured the tyranny and injustice upon which the Arakcheyev regime was built, but Obolensky and Rileyev, despite their real friendship for him, were often exasperated by the apathy he displayed during theoretical arguments and disputes concerning the advantages of this or that constitution and its suitability for Russia. Alexander Bestuzhev would often tease them: "You are dreamers, but I am a soldier! You do the thinking, and I'll do the deed."

Obolensky, another of Rileyev's assistants and a member of the Council, passionately supported the idea of a republic, yet when the time for action drew near, he sometimes hesitated and fell a prey to doubts.

* * *

A bleak November morning found Obolensky sitting in Rileyev's study. Gazing at his friend's face, he said dejectedly: "What a lucky man you are, Kondrati Fyodorovich, you are not tormented by doubts!"

"Try and put your doubts into words, they will vanish like smoke," Rileyev said earnestly. "Let us try and do it together. Now what is worrying you?"

"The nearer the time draws for starting action the more often I keep asking myself—have we the right, we, private individuals, a barely visible unit in our vast country, to undertake a coup d'état? To forcibly impose our system of opinions upon people who are content with the present or, if they do want a better future, prefer to have it through a painless historical process? Have we the right—"

"Then what are you doing in the Secret Society if you repudiate its very essence?" Rileyev broke in vehemently. "Are not we the people who have decided to make other people cleverer, kinder, better than they are? What gives us this right, you ask? I'll tell you: we have seen and realized all that is necessary for the common good. Ideas are born and develop freely in every thinking being. If those ideas are disinterested—and everyone knows they are—that is in itself a guarantee that they are directed towards the common good, that they are an expression by the few of what the majority of people feel but cannot express. You want proofs? Very well then: the moment such an idea, which fills a universal need, comes to the ears of the majority, they will drink it in like an arid desert thirsting for rain. Have you never observed the novices who join our Society?"

Natalia Mikhailovna, Rileyev's wife, came into the room.

"Please continue your argument in the dining-room. Luncheon has been served," she said.

On this occasion, however, the dispute did not last long.

Scarcely had they sat down to the so-called "Rileyev's Russian luncheon," traditional items of which were sauer-knaut with large chunks of black bread, when the tall figure of Trubetskoy, who had unexpectedly arrived from Kiev, appeared in the doorway. He had left for Kiev early in the spring and had returned only now, in the middle of November. He looked unusually grave and pre-occupied, as though he held the missing master-key that everyone so badly needed. Natalia Mikhailovna invited Trubetskoy to the table and tactfully withdrew.

"In the South we have our plans carefully laid," Trubetskoy said impressively. "Two army corps are definitely ours."

He glanced sharply into Rileyev's dark eyes and in-

quired meaningly: "And how does the Northern Society propose to assist the Southern?"

"During your absence, Trubetskoy," Obolensky said, flushing, "our membership has grown considerably. On the other hand, I hear that you have not admitted a single member on your own responsibility. But we were not afraid to do so." And he named the new officers he had personally enrolled. Rileyev, too, hastened to add: "I can rise with my group at a moment's notice."

"It's not enough to enroll new men," Trubetskoy retorted somewhat haughtily. "They have to be thoroughly instructed."

"In that respect Obolensky does not need prodding," Rileyev said gently, taking his friend's part. "If he isn't licking his novices into shape down in Kolomna, then who is? Only recently he worsted the 'unpersuadable disputer.'"

Obolensky, indeed, had been zealously gathering the officers in the large study of his private lodgings, which were crowded with Cavalier Gardes and officers of the Moscow, Finland and Horse Guard Regiments. These meetings were attended by Rostovtsev, his Staff-Office colleague, who lived in the same house, and whom Rileyev had called the "unpersuadable disputer."

This man had a queer, arresting face: a forehead flattened at the temples, lacklustre wandering eyes that always avoided his interlocutor, and a tiny mouth completely hidden by moustaches. A well-educated man who dabbled in poetry, he enjoyed his meetings with Rileyev, now a well-known poet, in Obolensky's rooms. At first Rostovtsev had professed monarchist views, and a special affection for the Grand Duke Nicholas, whom Obolensky knew well and hated heartily. All the stronger was Obolensky's desire to open Rostovtsev's eyes to the revolting nature of the autocracy. He spared no effort to bring Rostovtsev's ideas in line with the Secret So-

ciety's programme. Latterly Obolensky had seemed to think Rostovtsev already worthy of joining the Society, and had enrolled him in the hope that the novice's constant intercourse with free-thinking companions would work a healthy cure. "He has plenty of time until the spring of 1826 to become one of us," thought Obolensky.

But the date set for the rising of the Secret Society came earlier than was contemplated. The North and South had long since decided that the death of Alexander was to be the general signal for starting the rebellion. It so happened, however, that the Tsar died a natural death. The members of the Secret Society in St. Petersburg did not hear of this until November 27th, and two days before, as soon as it became known that his health was declining, the members gathered in Rileyev's rooms to discuss the plan of the rising.

The members of the Society thronged Rileyev's small flat day and night, to the horror and anguish of his poor wife. She had a presentiment of the disaster that lay in store for her husband as a result of what they were now plotting in his room.

Two men had arrived from Moscow—Ivan Pushchin (Pushkin's friend) and Baron Steingel. The latter was already an oldish man, who after his retirement kept an excellent *pension* for young men. Captain Yakubovich, the Caucasian officer, burst into the rooms like a whirlwind. He had long since threatened to assassinate Alexander against whom he nursed a grudge for having unjustly transferred him from the Guards to the Army. Through the joint efforts of his friends the Captain, so far, had been restrained from carrying out that threat. At the moment Yakubovich, with blazing eyes, thick Cossack moustaches and a black silk band round his forehead hiding the scar of a Chechen bullet, was bellowing in Rileyev's room: "While we were dawdling the Tsar went and died. *You* have cheated me of him!"

Trubetskoy, from whose elegant appearance and distinguished courtly manner one would never have suspected a conspirator, said that the garrison and the government offices, following Nicholas's example, had taken the oath to Constantine. He looked extremely flustered, and talked incoherently about having to leave at once for Kiev.

The sudden realization that instant action was called for had apparently thrown him into confusion.

The members of the Secret Society, young and old, surrounded Rileyev and bombarded him with questions: "What is the plan? When are we going to act?"

Rileyev expressed his innermost thought in a tone of deep earnestness:

"We must act. Future generations will call us cads if we miss this chance to overthrow the Tsar. Every minute is precious. We must make the fullest possible preparations to come to the aid of the Southern Society, which will rise at any moment now."

The plan of the rising was worked out in Rileyev's rooms amid heated argument.

Yakubovich, his eyes blazing with excitement, jumped up from his seat, and frightening Nastya, Rileyev's little daughter, who was playing in the adjoining nursery, shouted: "I know our people! Let them flock to the churches, raise the holy banners, go and take the palace. And, by God, they will!"

Yakubovich's wild behaviour shocked Trubetskoy.

"What is this you are preaching? Do you know who the population of the capital consists of? There are only forty thousand nobles, and more than double that number of menials, and a hundred thousand peasants. If they start settling old scores with their masters you'll get a mob riot, a Pugachov outbreak, instead of a revolution."

Kakhovsky kept repeating resentfully: "We mustn't be afraid of blood! We must strike, that's all."

However, fear of the popular movement, mistrust of the people itself and ignorance of it were so great among these revolutionary nobles that the bare idea of the people's possible participation in the uprising was unanimously rejected.

Trubetskoy's naïve proposal that the insurgent troops should be withdrawn from the city's precincts and peace negotiations started with the government only elicited smiles.

Trubetskoy thought better of it and put forward a new proposal: that the movement among the insurgent regiments was to spread from barrack to barrack, and only when a sufficiently large body of troops had been mustered, were the commanders to lead them out into Senate Square.

To put a stop to the disputes and thinking only of the hour when all this talk would give place to action, Rileyev proposed electing a leader of the military forces.

"It is not for us frock-coaters to take the military power, surely," he said, addressing Pushchin and Baron Steingel. "We must elect a military man as Dictator."

"Yes, we need a man of high military rank for that, a soldier with a brilliant fighting record and imposing epaulets," said Pushchin. "If Mikhail Orlov hasn't lost his old revolutionary ardour, we couldn't find a better man!"

"That 'if' is just where the catch is," Rileyev said regretfully. "Our eagle* is now a barn-yard hen. Since they clipped his wings in Kishinyov he has grown no others, and marriage has made him a tame bird. Who would have thought it!"

"Caricatures of him are circulating in Moscow," Pushchin observed with bitterness. "In one of them he

* Play on words in the Russian, *Oryol* (Eagle) being an allusion to Orlov.—*Ed.*

is shown in a child's pinafore, chalking the word 'Constitution' on a blackboard as if he were learning to write, while his wife wags an admonishing finger at him. In another he is shown as a goody-goody, grown fat from rural idleness, holding a skein of wool on his outspread hands, while his wife winds it into a ball. Underneath is the inscription: 'Idle Hours of an Eagle.' Who would have thought that of him!"

Rileyev rose from his seat.

"When a man is tied hand and foot, he will either sink into apathy or muster still more strength and break his fetters!" he said. He reflected for a moment, his eyes seeking Trubetskoy, and, not finding him, he went on: "Nevertheless, we shall write to Orlov on behalf of the whole Northern Society. In the meantime—even if Orlov does leave at once he won't be here before the nineteenth—for immediate action I propose Trubetskoy as Dictator. We can't afford to waste time, we must find a man among ourselves today. Who else is there?"

"Trubetskoy has Borodino behind him," Pushchin said weightily. "He is a Colonel and his personal bravery is beyond reproach. Bravery on the battlefield is one thing, however," he added thoughtfully, "and civil valour quite another. But you are right, we have no choice."

Rileyev asked his associates—the two Bestuzhevs and Kakhovsky—to help him prevail upon Trubetskoy. Obolensky and his officers joined them too. Trubetskoy was elected Dictator.

Among the various proposals for starting the rising Pestel's idea of a "Manifesto to the Russian Nation" signed by the Senate was suddenly revived.

Pestel had put forward this idea during his membership of the Prosperity League. It had been worked out in detail by the Secret Societies, and had formed the basis for unity between the North and the South, who had accepted it without dispute.

"Alexander is dead, there is no Tsar, the oath to Constantine has not been taken yet—there can be no better moment for a rebellion!" exclaimed Rileyev.

"Besides, everyone knows that the Guards hate Nicholas because he is so coarse, because he dubs everyone with enlightened ideas 'philosopher' and threatens to 'drive them all into the grave with consumption.' "

"In the absence of a Tsar our appeal to the Senate is only natural and the people will understand it," said Steingel. "We shall not be forcing any Tsar to grant a constitution. Some kind of introduction ought to be written to the 'Manifesto,' though. It should start like this: 'Brave soldiers! The Emperor Alexander has died, leaving Russia in a grievous plight. In his Will and Testament he has made Nicholas successor to the throne. But the Grand Duke has refused, declaring himself to be unfit for it, and was the first to take the oath to the Emperor Constantine. Now news has been received that the Crown Prince Constantine, too, emphatically refuses the throne. And so Nicholas and Constantine do not want to be, are incapable of being, fathers of the people.' "

Rileyev made a downward motion with his hand, as though barring someone's path, and said: "The Grand Assembly must be convened by means of the Senate, and until then the royal family must be arrested!"

"We could break into the palace," Alexander Bestuzhev shouted. "I'll lead the way, I know all the ins and outs! The seizure of the Winter Palace is inevitable if we have decided to arrest the royal family. And the men to do that are the Guards Naval Depot. We can reinforce them with the Izmailovsky Regiment, seeing that they have old scores of their own to settle with their former Brigade Commander Nicholas, now a claimant to the throne."

* * *

Trubetskoy wrote the "Manifesto." Now the Senate was to be induced to sign it. The "Manifesto" cited all the seven paragraphs laying down the main essence of the new administration, the new form of life for the Russian nation.

At a meeting in Rileyev's rooms he read out in his husky voice, which was deep with emotion:

"The Provisional Government is charged to put into effect the following:

" 'To level all rights of the social estates. To form local volost, uyezd, town and regional administrations. To form an internal national guard. To form a court of justice with a jury. To make recruitment equal for all classes of society. To do away with the standing army. To establish a system of elections to the Chamber of Deputies, which will be called upon in future to sanction the eventual form of government and the Statute of the State.' "

Trubetskoy paused for breath and ran his eye over the company.

"That is the 'Manifesto' the Senate must sign and make public," the Dictator solemnly concluded, and everyone present at the meeting had a feeling that the spell of inactivity was broken at last, that they had suddenly bridged the gulf between word and deed, and the thing they had been waiting for so long had started at last.

"Besides the Winter Palace, we must seize the banks, the Post Office and other vital points in the city in order to avoid disturbances," said Baron Rosen, Lieutenant of the Finland Regiment.

"The Grenadiers of the Life-Guards will capture the Peter and Paul Fortress," said Rileyev. "Their barracks are on the bank of the Bolshaya Nevka, quite close to the fortress."

"I second Rileyev's proposal!" exclaimed Bestuzhev, "the Grenadiers by all means! The Regiment's Second

and Third Fusilier Companies are on sentry duty there just now."

"I insist," Trubetskoy said loudly, shouting the others down, "that after the Senate has carried out our demands and promulgated the 'Manifesto to the Russian Nation,' the troops should withdraw from the city and camp outside it. There they will wait until the assembly of the gubernia deputies is held. I believe the morale of the troops will be better in camp conditions than in barracks."

"And I believe," said Pushchin, laughing, "that the 'Manifesto' itself, by reducing the term of army service for the soldiers and abolishing serfdom for the peasants, will infuse such life into the troops that there will be no restraining them!"

Baron Steingel, not without a spirit of mischief, proposed what he described as the most moderate and least sanguinary measure, namely, to proclaim Alexander's widow, Elizaveta Alexeyevna, the constitutional monarch.

"A woman is much easier to deal with," he explained, smiling. "We could very soon induce the Empress to renounce all power. And, as a last resort, we shall confer upon her the title of 'Mother of the Free Country,' and set up a monument to her during her lifetime."

Some laughed, others half-heartedly supported him. In the end, however, Rilejev's decision won the day—the whole royal family was to be kept under arrest until the Grand Assembly had decided its ultimate fate.

One thing was indubitably clear to all—the temper of the troops, of the people, of the whole city population could not be more favourable for starting the rising. It was necessary to act now, during this strangely prolonged interregnum.

* * *

The "game of shuttlecock with the crown" lasted seventeen days. Both Grand Dukes addressed each other

as "Your Majesty," but Constantine would not go to the extent of an official renunciation of the Russian throne that would enable Nicholas to ascend it.

People joked that there was a titular sovereign, but no real one, and no one knew who the real one would be.

A still better joke was: We are living without a Tsar and don't even notice the difference. Perhaps we can do without one altogether.

Rumours were steadily gaining ground that the late Emperor Alexander had definitely expressed a desire that his second brother, Nicholas, should succeed him to the throne over Constantine's head. All that was needed to set the public mind at ease was for Constantine to appear in person and confirm anew that he renounced the throne. But the members of the imperial family, to whom Russia was merely a patrimonial estate, continued to regard an affair that concerned the destiny of the whole country as their exclusive "family" affair. Constantine, who, like his brothers, had been educated to utterly disregard his responsibilities towards the state, had no sense of duty whatever. He refused to budge from Warsaw and kept doggedly and cynically repeating: "Let them clear the mess up themselves!"

Nicholas decided to move into the Winter Palace, and virtually began to rule the country.

Unrest among the soldiers steadily increased. Meetings were held in the barracks, and growing credence was given to the rumours that Alexander's Will was being kept hidden because it contained a clause reducing the term of military service for soldiers and another giving the peasants their freedom.

In view of this troubled mood among the soldiers, Rilejev and the two Bestuzhev brothers—Alexander and Nikolai—decided to start preparations for the rebellion. They could not stand this inactivity any longer.

At nights they now visited all the sentry posts, and

stopped every soldier they met, appealing to the men with ardent speeches and urging them in simple language to stand up for their rights. The members of the Secret Society were late with proclamations, but earnest, living speech seemed to them to carry more weight than the printed word.

The chill damp of those December nights laid Rileyev low with a severe cold. Although he was running a high fever, he continued to direct the rising, of which he remained the centre and guiding force.

The final plan of the rising was worked out and communicated to all the leading members of the Secret Society. It evoked no more arguments. According to that plan the insurgent regiments, that is, the regiments who could be induced not to take the oath of allegiance to Nicholas, would muster in Senate Square under the military command of the Dictator. Under threat of using arms the troops would compel the Senate to sign the "Manifesto to the Russian Nation" announcing that the tsarist government had been removed from office. Freedom would be proclaimed for the peasants, the soldiers' term of service would be reduced, and universal military service introduced. Until the Grand Assembly was convened the power was to be vested in a Provisional Government.

Further, according to this plan, which everyone had accepted, the men of the Guards Naval Depot together with those of the Izmailovsky Regiment were to seize the Winter Palace and arrest the royal family. Meanwhile the Finland Regiment and the Grenadiers were to seize the Peter and Paul Fortress. The ultimate fate of the royal family would be decided by the Grand Assembly, which was to draw up a constitution for Russia. For the purpose of guarding the insurgent city the troops were to be dislocated outside the town.

There was a good deal of talk about avoiding unnec-

essary bloodshed, and a growing conviction among most of the members of the Secret Society that bloodshed would be avoided altogether. Russian soldiers, it was averred, would never shoot at one another and would join the rising en masse.

The conspirators held that it would be too late to lead the rebel troops out into the square after the oath to Nicholas had been taken. The brief period preceding the taking of this oath was the best and, in Trubetskoy's opinion, the "right" time for effecting the revolution and making the Senate sign the "Manifesto to the Russian Nation."

To learn in good time the exact day and hour appointed for the second oath, it was necessary to keep in close touch with the palace and receive accurate information from inside.

This contact existed through a number of agencies. Captain Yakubovich pretty often cracked a bottle with Governor-General Miloradovich, who was said, on sound authority, to "let his tongue run away with him"; Spensky's secretary was a zealous member of the Secret Society; and Trubetskoy himself, as a Colonel of the Guards, was connected with the General Staff, and moreover had numerous relatives at court.

Although he had taken the oath to his brother, Nicholas "clung to the crown" and waited in an agony of suspense for his brother's formal abdication, which could be made public. At last, on December 12, a packet came from Constantine in Warsaw, which excited high hopes. But it merely proved to contain the Crown Prince's usual correspondence interlarded with gross vulgarities, which were only fit for the privacy of the family archives. Nicholas lost all patience and arbitrarily ascended the Russian throne without waiting any longer for an official invitation.

On the morning of December 13 Nicholas signed a man-

ifesto antedated the twelfth proclaiming his accession to the throne. A special meeting of the Council of State was fixed for 8 p.m. on the same day at the palace, and the next morning the general oath of allegiance to the new Emperor Nicholas was to be taken.

The elder Bestuzhev, Nikolai, learned of this decision from Speransky's secretary several hours after the event.

Bestuzhev dashed off to Rileyev's rooms where a conference was in progress.

"It has all been settled. The new Tsar has fixed the oath for the fourteenth."

"We must verify whether that is so," Rileyev said.

"I know it for certain," Trubetskoy confirmed. The Attorney-General of the Senate, a member of the Society, had called on him, bearing similar news.

All the men were gripped by a tremendous excitement. Above the general hum of voices Nikolai Bestuzhev's earnest voice stood out distinctly.

"On December 14th we shall give the signal for the rising," he was saying. "And the Senate will sign our 'Manifesto' at the point of the sword."

"And that will be the end of accursed serfdom!" exclaimed Pushchin.

Excited voices cried: "Elected deputies will take the place of the officials in the gubernias! Down with corruption! Long live the free deputies!"

Lieutenant Arbutov came running in to tell Yakubovich that the men of the Guards Naval Depot wanted him to take over command of them.

Yakubovich rose to his full great height and said somewhat theatrically: "I'll show them tomorrow how to face the bullets!"

He looked imposing with that black band over his forehead, those burning eyes and loud speech.

Rileyev said he had new first-hand evidence that the military colonies, especially those at Staraya Russa,

were worked up into a passion of indignation and were ready to join the rising at the first opportunity.

Someone doubted whether it was advisable to implicate the military colonies in case of failure.

Nikolai Bestuzhev suddenly voiced an excellent idea, which no one before him had thought of: in the event of failure they were to fall back upon the military colonies with whatever troops remained and endeavour to stir them to rebellion. If this failed, too, they were to withdraw into the interior of Russia and proclaim freedom for the peasants.

Trubetskoy winced and paled. He had shied even at the word "freedom" in the "Manifesto to the Russian Nation" for fear of peasant disturbances. With his usual restraint, he proposed that an attempt be made in the name of all the assembled members to summon Mikhail Orlov from Moscow.

"I may be useful to the Society within the next few days," he said, "but Orlov may be still more useful in the future."

"Quite right!" voices were raised. "We cannot count on Orlov for immediate action. The fat will be in the fire here before he can arrive!"

They said it was necessary to notify Pestel and Sergei Muravyov the sooner to establish contact with the Southern Society.

"It will take a fortnight at least to reach them," Rileyev said ruefully. "A simultaneous rising of North and South would make victory certain!"

It appeared that the youngest of the Muravyov-Apostol brothers—Ippolit—was leaving St. Petersburg for the South to visit his brothers Sergei and Matvei.

"Ippolit has just been promoted to quartermaster-en-sign, and can be trusted. I'll write Sergei a letter," said Trubetskoy.

* * *

Almost on the eve of the rebellion the conspirators, upon verifying their forces, found that the men they could firmly rely upon were very few.

Trubetskoy had failed to enlist the Commander of the Semyonovsky Regiment, a former member of the Prosperity League, and the Commander of the Second Battalion of the Finland Regiment met all Nikolai Bestuzhev's proposals with the retort: "I have no intention of serving as a tool in other men's hands in an affair that is likely to cost me my head!"

The plan of enlisting the aid of the artillery was also open to doubt.

Just now Trubetskoy was sitting in Rileyev's room. Rileyev, still weak after his illness, was lying on the sofa.

Leaning on the table, which was littered with books and papers, with his head in his hands, Trubetskoy said in a tone of despair he made no attempt to disguise:

"We made a mistake in thinking we could do without bloodshed, a bad mistake! At first my only concern was to keep the troops from 'running amuck.' I hoped that their numbers alone would make the government reckon with them and hear them out. All I wanted was armed pressure, but no fighting! Now that the actual forces at our disposal count up so poorly I come to the conclusion—"

Rileyev, overcoming his weakness, rose on his elbow, an angry gleam in his eyes, and said with inexorable firmness:

"There can be only one conclusion under those circumstances—the palace and the fortress must be taken by a surprise attack if we are to succeed at all. That must be done immediately after the troops have been mustered. No matter how few, they must all be thrown against the palace! Take them by surprise, then you can do big things with few men."

Trubetskoy nervously took a turn about the small room, then crossed to the sofa and gripped Rileyev's two hands, saying quietly: "It would be best to put it off. . . . I don't mean dropping it, but just putting it off! And the Society should let me go to Kiev at once to establish contact with the Second Army."

Rileyev withdrew his hands.

"You? You want to leave St. Petersburg? At such a time?"

He stared at Trubetskoy in blank surprise, then said ruthlessly:

"You are wanted here. Ippolit Muravyov will convey whatever is necessary to the Southern Society. He is on his way already. There is no going back for any of us. We have burnt our boats."

Trubetskoy's face darkened.

"You are just spinning dreams, but I, as a soldier, realize the actual correlation of forces. What's the good of a few officers raising a few companies? It would be quite a different thing if, as we recently dreamed, whole regiments of soldiers refused to take the oath to Nicholas. But there are no hopes of that now. It's too late to persuade them, even if it were possible."

Rileyev shut his eyes and a grimace, as of pain, crossed his face.

"No, Trubetskoy, I am not spinning dreams," he said quietly. "I am right, I know it, although appearances are against us. You said: 'What's the good of a few officers raising a few companies?' You are wrong! It will do a lot of good if only a handful of brave men come out in the square and hurl their defiance in the face of accursed tsarism, that age-old rock of tyranny, shouting: 'Your power is ended! You shall be destroyed!'"

Overcome by emotion, he fell back upon the cushions of the sofa, but a moment later continued in the same earnest, but quiet voice:

"Yes, I firmly believe that that evil power will be destroyed, if not by us, then by others. And we should be proud that we are the first to start the battle. That is the least we can do at present. That is why we must act with whatever forces are available. It is the beginning of a great struggle, the beginning of our victory."

* * *

During those critical days preceding the rising Trubetskoy was but one of many men who were overwhelmed by a sense of their futility in the face of that great military force, which, discontented though it was with the government, was nevertheless strongly welded together by the iron laws of customary discipline. It required all Rileyev's great strength of character and eloquence to encourage and convince the waverers.

Nor was Alexander Bestuzhev to be found wanting. Never had he been so full of energy, so eager to be up and doing. He still dined with his Duke in the capacity of adjutant, wrote articles for the journal at night, and early in the morning burst into Rileyev's house at Sini Most, proclaiming his preparedness with a shout of glee: "I am crossing the Rubicon, slashing left and right!"

No surprises could now shake Rileyev's confidence, not even the sudden statement by Baron Rosen, Lieutenant of the Finland Regiment, that instead of the promised rising of his whole regiment he could only answer for his own rifle platoon. As for the company commanders, now that the thing was starting in earnest, they could not be relied upon at all.

Not even the ugly scene that took place at Obolensky's lodgings on the very eve of the revolt could shake Rileyev's self-possession.

Rostovtsev, the officer of the General Staff, whom everyone believed Obolensky to have won over to the

cause when he enrolled him in the Secret Society with such an air of triumph, turned out to be a traitor. He wrote Nicholas a letter, warning him of the danger that threatened him unless measures were taken to frustrate the planned rebellion. It would seem, however, that Rostovtsev mentioned no names.

He told Rileyev and Obolensky himself what he had done, and tried to put a noble interpretation upon his deed.

"I wanted to save you all from ruin, and the country from a needless shock. Give up your mad plans before it is too late!"

He spoke in a stage whisper, his eyes, as usual, looking past his interlocutors and not at them.

Rileyev and Obolensky maintained a stunned silence. Rostovtsev shot a glance at them and said defiantly: "I did my honest duty, and if you want to, you can kill me."

Obolensky, his face livid with rage, rushed at Rostovtsev, but the latter dodged him with unexpected agility and disappeared.

"I'll shoot him like a dog," Obolensky muttered, furiously pulling open the drawers of his desk and scattering the papers right and left in his search for a pistol.

Rileyev checked him and put his hands on his shoulders.

"Drop it, Obolensky," he said vehemently. "Remember, we shall need all our energy now for one thing. We are starting action, you know. It's your own fault for trusting a scoundrel too easily. He can't do much mischief, though. The Tsar knows everything as it is."

Nikolai Bestuzhev came in and was told what had happened. He sized Rostovtsev up without hesitation:

"He wants to serve God and the devil at the same time. He discloses the plot to Nicholas, and clears himself as far as we are concerned by a 'frank' confession. We cannot take it from him on trust that no names were men-

tioned, as honest Rileyev is inclined to believe, and it's no use shooting him like a dog, the way Obolensky wants to. The thing is to keep this affair from the other members of the Society. We must start the rising in spite of everything. Better to be taken out in the square than in bed!"

"You are right," Rileyev said. "We may be seized suddenly and no one will know where we are and why we disappeared. But if we come out in the square the government will not be able to hush it up, and the whole world will know that the autocracy has fierce and courageous opponents, and that the serfs have their defenders. The whole world will learn what we wanted for our country."

The nearer the hour for the rising drew the more thought did Rileyev give to the expediency of another plan—that of quietly putting Nicholas out of the way before the troops were brought out into the square. He believed that the rest of the plan could then be carried out without bloodshed.

This idea of regicide formed a bond between Rileyev and a remarkable man, Pyotr Kakhovsky, a retired lieutenant of the Grenadier Guards. Kakhovsky, quite a youth at the time, had attracted Rileyev's attention by his Byronic striving to lay down his life for the liberation of Greece. The man's ardour and determination had appealed to the poet, and he had called Kakhovsky "the Russian Sand," in memory of the German student who had stabbed the spy Kotzebue in 1819.

In a remote corner of the Smolensk Gubernia, where he lived after his retirement, Kakhovsky had made the acquaintance of Saltikova, a young lady of an aristocratic family, who eventually became the wife of Delvig, Pushkin's friend. The acquaintance had ripened into a love affair, which for the young lady had been but a rural diversion. Her refusal to marry Kakhovsky was such

a severe blow to him that he gave up all thought of future love and happiness for himself.

The ruin of his youthful hopes, however, had not crushed Kakhovsky; on the contrary, it had steeled his character and helped him to break away from the narrow circle of his private interests. When he appeared in St. Petersburg in 1824 he was already wholly devoted to the revolutionary movement. Intellectually he stood on a level with the leading members of the Secret Society, and Rileyev not only enrolled him in the Society, but very soon initiated him in all the important affairs concealed from the majority. Among other things, Rileyev had also expressed his ideas about the necessity of doing away with the royal family. From Kakhovsky's answers he had gathered that the man had long been cherishing a similar plan.

"That's right," Kakhovsky had said reflectively. "The thing is to avoid internecine war. Therefore, I regard it as a deed of valour and not a crime to do away with the royal family for the common good. Was it not you, dear Rileyev, who sang the praise of Brutus and held his deed up as a supreme example of self-sacrifice? With all my heart I agree with you!"

Such revolutionary ardour on the part of this inconspicuous lieutenant amazed everyone. People had noticed nothing but his protruding upper lip, which lent a droll touch of boyish audacity to his face. Everyone had heard about his unfortunate wooing of the young society lady, of his official troubles and extreme poverty, but no one suspected that he had in him such capacities for sheer heroism.

Although Rileyev felt attracted to Kakhovsky and sympathized with him, yet there was something guarded in his attitude towards him. There was a sort of intensity, a reckless determination in the man's character that frightened him.

Kakhovsky was proud, and wanted to be looked upon as the chosen one whose self-sacrifice was to light the way for the others like a torch in the dark. He was not by any means conceited, but he genuinely felt himself to be the agency through which the will of the whole Secret Society was expressed. He so sincerely believed in his role that he demanded of Rileyev an account of all the Council's plans and measures. Indeed, what secrets could there be from a man who, for the common weal, had sworn his own doom?

Kakhovsky's unseemly pretensions sometimes goaded Rileyev into saying hard things.

"You have a high opinion of yourself," he would say with annoyance. "You are just an ordinary member of the Society, and must wait for the instructions of your seniors before you can act. At any rate, so far you have no say in the decisions of the Council."

"It works out then that I am thrusting myself upon you for a deed of valour, while you are casting about how to make more cunning use of me?" Kakhovsky said, offended.

"Through you we are getting a whole Grenadier Guards Regiment to join us. Isn't that enough for you?"

It was not enough for Kakhovsky.

"I am not a dagger in your hand," he proudly declared, "I am ready to die of my own free will in my country's interests, but to be made merely a blind tool of assassination—no!"

They quarrelled one moment, and made up the next. Kakhovsky had gone on working tirelessly in his old Grenadier Guards Regiment, cultivating freedom-loving ideas among the officers and sedulously enrolling tried and trusty young men in the Society.

And now the hour had struck when, in Rileyev's opinion, the heroic deed to which Kakhovsky had dedicated

his life became at last essential for the cause of the Secret Society.

On the night of December 13th, the eve of the rising, a large gathering was to be held in Rileyev's rooms. At dusk a preliminary meeting of intimate associates, all members of the Supreme Council, was held in his study. Pushchin, Obolensky, and Nikolai and Alexander Bestuzhev were there. Kakhovsky, with his pipe in his hand, sat slightly apart on his favourite seat by the window.

"The last hours of our headquarters at Sini Bridge are expiring," Alexander Bestuzhev said half-jokingly. "First thing tomorrow morning our mustering point will be Senate Square."

"By the statue of Peter the Great," Obolensky intoned. "That's who ought to take an interest in things—get off his horse to espouse a just cause and take over command of the troops."

"Looking for support from an autocrat?" Rileyev said smiling, then added gravely: "Trubetskoy will be able to direct the soldiers where and when they are wanted. Friends," he said, addressing the company at large, "do not let us give way to doubts! I am glad to be able to communicate gratifying news: men arrived from the South confirm the rumours that the Southern Society really disposes of troops a hundred thousand strong, who are ready to rise! And another thing I am happy about," Rileyev said, his eyes shining, "is that Pestel's cherished dream of unity among all the forces of liberation is about to come true. The very thought of the Southern troops is a great encouragement to us, and our rising in the square tomorrow will be the signal for them to start action and give us their powerful support."

"And Pestel himself, as it were," Obolensky interjected with deep feeling, "will be taking the first, momentous step at the head of our whole movement when, under his old programme, we shall force the Senate to sign

and promulgate the 'Manifesto to the Russian Nation!'

"Yes, precisely so," Rileyev murmured musingly. "But what worries me is.... Friends," he raised his voice, "what gives me no peace is the thought that we have in our hands an infallible remedy against bloodshed and internecine strife."

Everyone pricked up his ears and looked at Rileyev expectantly. Pushchin and Nikolai Bestuzhev broke off the conversation they were engaged in. Rileyev, deeply agitated, came out from behind the desk at which he had been sitting, took a turn about the room to collect his thoughts, then stopped by the window next to Kakhovsky. Suddenly he turned to him and said:

"What we need is not the Tsar's arrest, but his utter annihilation together with his family! Only then will all parties unite of their own accord, all the troops will join us and our cause is sure to win!" Rileyev embraced Kakhovsky impetuously and exclaimed: "Lead the way. Kill the Emperor!"

Kakhovsky, throwing his pipe aside, sprang to his feet. At that moment no one thought the Lieutenant plain-looking, although his face twitched and he could hardly keep back his tears.

The men surrounded him, expressing delight at his readiness to perform this act of heroism.

"The success of the rising is in your hands," Rileyev said solemnly.

At the meeting that night Rileyev's rooms were crowded. All were keyed up to a pitch of feverish excitement.

In place of the formidable array of regiments that had been expected to take part in the rising, the last checking had merely revealed a few odd companies. Nevertheless Trubetskoy's attempts to call a retreat were in vain. The young men, spell-bound by Rileyev's ardour, believed wholeheartedly in the success of their venture.

Rileyev's pale face shone with an emotion akin to ecstasy. Looking round the company with burning eyes, as if drawing them all into the single torrent of his own emotions, he said confidently:

"The most important thing is to strike the first blow. It will throw them into utter confusion, I am certain. Our further course of action will depend upon the circumstances. We cannot very well hold a rehearsal of the rising."

"We will either win or die in the attempt!" shouted Alexander Bestuzhev.

And Rileyev continued:

"Remember, friends, what counts tomorrow is not the number of insurgent troops, nor even military success, but the thing we are going to fight for in the square, be we many or few. Friends, our history has known many a palace coup, when one objectionable Tsar was changed for another, but never until now has there been a revolt against the power of all and every Tsar! For the very first time in Russia war is going to be declared against the Tsar and his tyranny. And it is we who are going to do that tomorrow!"

The young officers, in voices that shook with emotion, recited the last verses which Rileyev had written in snatches between the two stormy meetings:

*I will not be of those who while their youth away
In Venus' soft embrace, in laxity supine,
Nor will my rebel soul remain inert and pine
Away beneath the despot's ruthless sway.*

The meeting broke up late at night, and the men went home to meet again in the square in the morning of the fourteenth. They went away fondly believing that the Tsar's troops, even those that were unprepared to accept the rebels' ideas and sentiments, would join them instant-

ly, and if not, would at any rate refuse to shoot at their own men.

It was arranged that Yakubovich and Arbuzov, with the men of the Guards Naval Depot, were to rouse the Izmailovsky men and come out into the square all together by way of Voznesensky Prospect. Mikhail Pushchin was to join them with the Horse-Pioneer Squadron. Nikolai Bestuzhev and Rileyev were to attach themselves to the sailors of Arbuzov's company. Mikhail Bestuzhev was ordered to rouse the Moscow Regiment and lead the men out into the square by way of Gorokhovaya Street.

The Bestuzhev brothers—Nikolai and Mikhail—left Rileyev's house together. The brothers were good friends, but lately they had had few occasions to meet on a family footing.

"How fine Rileyev was today," Nikolai said softly. "Usually he's an awkward speaker and anything but good-looking, but love of his country simply transfigures him. I couldn't help admiring him all the time. During one of the intervals Rileyev came up to where I was sitting with Suthoff, took our hands and said: 'Good luck, men of deeds, not of words! You do not rave, like Yakubovich, but I am certain you will give a good account of yourselves.' "

"I perfectly agree with him," Mikhail Bestuzhev said hastily. "To tell you the truth, I don't like that Caucasian with the fiery eyes."

"They say he is a brave man in his way," Nikolai tried to defend him.

"Possibly, but what is he like in secret affairs of state—has anyone tested him? Brother Alexander, too, says of him: 'Tomorrow Yakubovich is certain to think of some brave way of betraying us.' Oh, to the devil with Yakubovich!" Mikhail added with a gesture of dismissal. "It's Rileyev who interests me. You know, Nikolai, when-

ever I look at him I am reminded of his verses. D'you remember that time when I was ill and stayed in his rooms at Sini Most? He was just finishing his *Confessions of Nalivaiko*."

"An excellent poem," Nikolai nodded. "What of it?"

"Well, one day he came in beaming and says: 'Congratulate me, Michel, I have finished it. Just listen to this passage.' And he read me some lines. I can't get them out of my mind. I'm afraid they may prove to be prophetic."

"What are the lines, if you remember them?" Nikolai said.

Mikhail recited with feeling:

*Well do I know that he who first
Against his land's oppressors durst
Rise in rebellion, always dies.
Already doomed by fate am I,
But where and when did Liberty
Without a sacrifice arise!
Yes, I shall perish for my land,
I feel the cold of coming death.
But firm shall be my heart and hand
While flows my blood and lasts my breath.*

"What a dauntless spirit!" Nikolai whispered. "If Rileyev identifies his fate with that of Nalivaiko, it means that he believes in the victory of our cause!"

Mikhail gazed thoughtfully at the distant outlines of the Neva.

"I remember what Rileyev told me when he saw how deeply his verses had stirred me," he said at length. "Those words, despite their frightful import, are enshrined in my heart, not with a sense of doom, but as a noble banner of the cause for which tomorrow we are going out on Senate Square."

The brothers slackened their steps. Nikolai stood waiting, his brows drawn together sternly.

"I remember Rileyev's exact words and shall never forget them," Mikhail Bestuzhev repeated, then uttered distinctly: " 'Even though we are destined to die, we must win freedom for Russia with our blood. Even failure is essential if only because it will waken the slumbering Russians.' "

CHAPTER SIX

On the eve of the fourteenth of December, long after his friends and associates had gone, Rileyev sat in the unaccustomed stillness of his study sunk deep in thought. This hushed silence after the disputes and noise that had recently filled the room struck him as strange. Only now did he realize how tired he was, and how badly he needed solitude to collect his thoughts. He went over all the details of the plan for tomorrow's rising and found that everything had been decided right. Unless insurmountable obstacles arose they were sure to succeed. But then, who could tell what unforeseen circumstances might crop up.

Whatever the practical result of tomorrow's affair was likely to be, the very thought of the troops coming out into the square of their own accord with arms in hand, filled Rileyev with a quiet exultation. An attempt would be made for the first time by Russian people to openly assert their human and civil rights in the face of the autocracy.

Rileyev had no doubts about the sailors taking part in the seizure of the Winter Palace. Alexander Bestuzhev, who lived in the same house, had his youngest brother, Midshipman Pyotr, staying with him that night. Pyotr, who had been at the meeting the previous night, had confirmed that everything was in order at the Guards Naval Depot and the men firmly stood by their decision to start action.

A sharp pang went through Rileyev's heart at the thought of the danger that threatened the Bestuzhev brothers. It was fear of those agonizing thoughts that had made him drive from him the image of his wife and his daughter Nastenka. His anxiety for them made his heart turn cold.

He pressed his head between his hands, trying to keep his thoughts from straying. But the vision of the Bestuzhevs' mother suddenly rose before his eyes. Only a few days ago the whole family had gathered for dinner in her cozy little flat on Vasilievsky Island. He and Pushchin had been invited, too. All five sons had sat at the table with their three sisters and their mother. What a look of proud contentment there had been on the mother's face. With what love her eyes had travelled from face to face, as she said: "Alexander has made a name for himself now, but if you ask me Nikolai is cleverer and no worse a writer than he. Did you read that thing he wrote about Holland? And Mikhail—that one sailed to Iceland." Pyotr and Pavel were still children to her, but Pyotr, like the three elder Bestuzhevs, was already a member of the Secret Society, and tomorrow all her sons would be in the square. How many of them would return no one could tell.

Rileyev felt an irresistible desire to take a look at his wife and daughter, quietly, without wakening them, without harrowing tears.

He opened the door of the bedroom so carefully that Natalia, his wife, who was a light sleeper, did not even stir. She had been worried to death these last few days: her husband's friends, the conspirators—that much she had known for a long time—hardly ever left their house, and her husband, absorbed in his affairs which he kept secret from her, avoided her eyes and barely recognized her on the rare occasions when they met. Beside the pillow of his sleeping wife lay a familiar volume—his first

verses. He was deeply touched—Natalia had been reading over again the lines he had dedicated to her:

*Happy am I when sitting by your side
I drink in your sweet beauty with my eye,
And o'er your gentle form my loving glances glide,
Happy am I!...*

Nastenka smiled in her sleep. Rileyev hastily withdrew, fearing to give himself away. He returned to his study.

It was only five years since he, a retired second-lieutenant of a Horse-Artillery company, had become engaged to Natalia, the only daughter of loving parents. They had lived through so much within that short time that it seemed an age. Perhaps the only time when Natalia had been really happy was when they had lived together in the country soon after the wedding. Within a year fame had come to him unexpectedly. His poem *To the Favourite* had appeared, which excited universal admiration for its audacity, and had brought him the laurels of recognition as a poet together with terrors for poor Natalia, who lived in fear of Arakcheyev's wrath and vengeance. Later had come more poignant sorrows and Natalia was often to be seen in tears—gone was her once considerate husband, gone all the little joys of domestic life. His comrades, his conferences with them and their day-and-night disputes claimed all his spare time.

"Poor thing," Rileyev thought, "what little joy you have had with me, and what you have still to face. Perhaps Pestel was right not to link his life with a woman?"

Before daybreak Obolensky announced his arrival by a gentle tap. Rileyev answered the door himself.

"I've come on horseback. I have hitched my horse to a tree by the Moika," Obolensky said. "I hope no one walks off with it. But better let us go out together for a minute. Take the street-door key with you."

"I will not get any sleep just the same," said Rileyev. He dressed quickly and went out into the deserted snowy street with Obolensky.

"I dropped in to see whether you had any news," Obolensky said. His voice sounded cheerful. "I'm off to the Horse-Pioneers to see Mikhail Pushchin. I'm afraid that he won't lead the squadron out. He'll be waiting to see what the Izmailovsky men will do—they are his neighbours, you know."

"Ivan Pushchin vouched for his brother Mikhail," said Rileyev, "but you'd better go and make sure."

"How quiet the city is," said Obolensky. "The only living creature—the Neva—is imprisoned in ice. Have you noticed it's gone colder? Pretty sharp frost."

"Yes, it's quiet," Rileyev said, shivering with the cold, "and no one knows what is going to happen in these squares this morning."

"I'm riding about taking leave of the city, as it were," said Obolensky. "It seems to me that tomorrow everything in it will be new, different."

"It will, my friend," Rileyev said, squeezing his hand.

Obolensky galloped off and Rileyev returned to his rooms. On the staircase he met Alexander Bestuzhev, who lived in the same house. Together they entered his study. Bestuzhev looked pale and worried.

"Is anything the matter?" Rileyev said, his face clouding.

"Yakubovich has just called on me. He flatly refuses to lead the sailors out into the square."

"What!" shouted Rileyev. "Only a few hours ago he swore that he would show the sailors how to face the bullets. Was it not he who accepted Arbuzov's proposal to take the lead of the Naval Guards?"

"But at three in the morning he changes his mind," Bestuzhev said, spreading his hands. "Yakubovich says: 'I came away from the meeting at Rileyev's in the most

buoyant of spirits, and then suddenly these overmastering doubts and pricks of conscience! If I am to seize the Winter Palace with the sailors there is no stopping them. In the confusion they'll cut down the family and perhaps finish off the Tsar himself. Nicholas has done me no harm, and if I thirsted for revenge it was against Alexander, not Nicholas.' "

"And the interests of the common cause, I suppose, mean nothing to Yakubovich?" Rileyev said angrily. "Did you explain to him that he is wiping out our whole plan from the very outset?"

"I all but gave him a good thrashing, I was so furious! It was no use. 'I would not lead the men out if my life depended upon it,' he said. 'But I'll be in the square and will take all the risks that you take.' Oh, damn the fellow! We've got to do something without delay!"

They were silent for a minute, weighing the situation, then decided to renew contact with the sailors through Lieutenant Arbuzov and carry out their original plan. Lieutenant Arbuzov had become friendly with Rileyev only recently, at the beginning of December, had attended the conferences at his place and had once visited Obolensky. His whole aspect and behaviour had inspired confidence, and when he had sworn that he would lead some four hundred men out into the square everyone had believed him. Arbuzov had explained the necessity for the rising to his sailors, had sown the seeds of enlightenment among them, and enlisted their warm sympathy for the struggle for Russia's freedom.

"It is impossible for me, a civilian, to take over command of the sailors," Rileyev said sadly.

Bestuzhev set his mind at rest.

"I'll send a note to my brother Nikolai straight away with Pyotr. Although Pyotr has only recently been enrolled in the Society I'll answer for him with my life."

Alexander Bestuzhev called his younger brother Mid-

shipman Pyotr downstairs, hastily told him what it was all about and ordered him to warn Arbuzov in the barracks about the change of plan, and to find his elder brother Nikolai and hand him a note appointing him in Yakubovich's place.

Pyotr, one of the younger Bestuzhev brothers, had been in the navy for five years, and had distinguished himself in the service. He was of a taciturn habit and fond of poetry. His soul yearned for deeds of valour. His brothers were anxious to save the youth from the fate that threatened them; they wanted to save him for their mother's sake, but he had insisted on having his own way and had come from Kronstadt on the eve of the rising.

Pyotr discharged his errand successfully. He found Arbuzov at the Naval Guards' barracks and told him about the change of commanders, then ran into his brother Nikolai outside the barracks. Nikolai was coming from Rileyev's, where he had learned about his appointment, and Pyotr gave him further information which he had picked up at the barracks, where, in addition to Arbuzov, he had seen several young officers. They had all said that the men were eager for the fight and delay was intolerable.

Glad that contact with the sailors had not been broken, Nikolai Bestuzhev calmly entered the barracks. He knew that his appearance there would cause no surprise. Previously he had been acting as Yakubovich's assistant, but now he wielded full authority and was the sole officer responsible for bringing the sailors out into the square.

Nikolai Bestuzhev consulted his watch. It was four minutes past nine. Such was the hour when a wan sun rose on December 14, 1825.

At daybreak, which came pale and cold, Rileyev received another shock. Kakhovsky, who had left the previous evening seemingly resolved to assassinate Nicholas, had likewise changed his mind.

Rileyev himself had not seen Kakhovsky. The latter, in a highly overwrought state, had dropped in on Alexander Bestuzhev for a moment to tell him about his refusal and had disappeared again, avoiding Rileyev's flat. Kakhovsky, according to Bestuzhev's account, had reverted overnight to the same thoughts which had caused his quarrel with Rileyev the previous autumn. He had repeated the very same words: "I am ready to sacrifice myself, but I most emphatically refuse to be used as an assassin's dagger in anyone's hands! All the more that I shall be thrown out of the Society for it." Rileyev's plan was to have the Tsar removed in such a way that the deed would be attributed to some outsider. "We shall disavow you, Kakhovsky, but will provide you with the means for escaping from Russia," Rileyev had said.

"Obviously, Kakhovsky did not really mean to accept your proposal," Bestuzhev said, deeply agitated. "Yesterday he was carried away by the general excitement and hero-worship and agreed to act the forlorn hope on the spur of the moment. Now he has thought better of it."

Rileyev looked gloomy.

"This is a serious complication," he said. "It is one thing to seize the palace when the claimant to the throne is no longer there, and quite another to seize it with a living Tsar and his whole family."

Trubetskoy dropped in. Bestuzhev told him at once about Yakubovich and Kakhovsky. Rileyev, who was staring hard at Trubetskoy's face, fancied he saw upon it an expression of ill-concealed joy.

"Can it be that he is afraid?" thought Rileyev, and horror gripped his heart. "Will Trubetskoy betray us?" At that moment the Captain of the Finland Regiment arrived and confirmed his readiness to bring the soldiers out into the square. Rileyev recovered his confidence in Trubetskoy when the latter turned to the Captain and said in a dictatorial tone:

"Be quick about it. The senators have not taken the oath yet, but they have started to assemble. How do you think we are going to influence them if the square is as empty as it is now? When the troops are mustered I will come out to them."

* * *

Rileyev was all afire with the excitement of battle. Swiftly and precisely he issued orders and dispatched messages through the young officers to the nearest barracks and to Baron Rosen, whose regiment was quartered on Vasilievsky Island. He called upon all sympathizing commanders to take prompt action.

Rileyev's wife woke up. She dressed Nastenka and listened to the voices in her husband's study, trying to guess who was there. She recognized the voices of Pushchin and Bestuzhev. "So early?" she thought in surprise. Perhaps her husband had not slept at all, while she had been sleeping so heavily. These last few days had been such a tiring time. He had such a bad cold and he was so run down, and here they were forever arguing. They were at it again now, at peep of dawn.

No longer able to subdue her anxiety Natalia ran out into the hall, where the men were already putting on their coats to go out. Terrified, she seized Nikolai Bestuzhev's arm.

"Do not lead my husband to his death! My heart tells me. Nastenka!" she cried, rushing into the nursery. "Beg Papa he should not leave us!"

Rileyev, himself white as a ghost, caught his wife as she fell swooning, laid her carefully upon the sofa and called the maid. He hastily embraced the bewildered child, who gazed at him with sheer terror in her blue eyes, and dashed out of the house without looking back. It was a painful scene for his companions, too. Each was thinking at that moment of his own near and dear ones.

Rileyev and Pushchin, being civilians, were not admitted into any of the barracks, and they went out to the square. It was still deserted. The doors of the Senate kept opening to let out venerable men in cocked plumed hats and in greatcoats with beaver collars.

"The fate of the Empire has just been decided in that building or is being decided now," Rileyev said gloomily. "They will take the oath to Nicholas and that will be the end. We did nothing to prevent it."

"Not a soul anywhere," said Pushchin. "We shall have to do without the Senate. As soon as the troops come out the Dictator will have to lead them all to the palace."

With a last glance at the empty square Pushchin and Rileyev directed their steps towards the Laval house where Trubetskoy lived. It was quite near Senate Square. The front entrance with its two stone lions faced the English Embankment.

A liveried footman, who was apparently expecting them, met the early visitors and conducted them without a word up the richly carpeted stairs straight into Trubetskoy's study. Trubetskoy came forward hastily to greet them and announced in some confusion that the Horse Guards had already taken the oath to the Tsar. Nicholas had been in a great hurry with them because Constantine was their chief. The senators had taken the oath, too.

Trubetskoy handed them Nicholas's manifesto concerning his ascension to the throne. It still smelt of printer's ink. "This has just been printed at the Senate print shop," he said.

"I suppose our Society's 'Manifesto' addressed to the people through the Senate will remain lying in Steingel's pocket?" Pushchin said irritably.

"We shall do what we have to do without the Senate," Rileyev said in an incisive tone. "When the troops take the Winter Palace circumstances themselves will sug-

gest what further course of action to take. It's the first step that counts."

"What can we do if only two or three companies mutiny?" Trubetskoy said dispiritedly. Glancing aside, he muttered, as though speaking to himself: "We're too late, yes, too late."

"We shall meet in the square, Trubetskoy!" Rileyev said in a peremptory tone, bowing. Then he told Pushchin to hurry up and go out to meet the troops. "Let us check the barracks—I am sure that many companies are on the way if not already on the spot."

"Prince Trubetskoy," Pushchin said, addressing the Dictator with unusual solemnity, "I presume..." He paused, fixing a piercing eye on Trubetskoy, then went on: "I presume that you will be out there in the square, where it is your duty to be as our Dictator, elected by the members of our Secret Society?"

Trubetskoy was on the point of answering, but he changed his mind and merely bent his head. Whether this was a sign of concurrence or an expression of his low spirits, Rileyev and Pushchin had no time to decide. All their energies and attention were absorbed in the urgent task of bringing out into the square as many soldiers as possible.

"I rely on the Bestuzhev brothers," Rileyev said when they were out in the street. "They will not waver."

He was right. While Nikolai was working up the enthusiasm of the Naval Guard, his brother Alexander was at the Moscow Regiment's quarters.

"The thing is to get the troops out into the square. Once there, they will not have to be told what they have risen for," Alexander Bestuzhev thought as he gave the soldiers orders to take live cartridges with them.

Mikhail Bestuzhev's company marched out first, followed by Shchepin-Rostovsky's. Suddenly they reminded themselves that they had forgotten to take the regimental

colours. They went back for them. By the time they started out again with the colours at the head, the regimental and brigade commanders came upon the scene. They stopped the soldiers at the gates and tried to persuade them to return to their barracks. Shchepin, worked up by Bestuzhev's all-night impassioned speeches about liberty, whipped out his sword and struck the Regimental Commander Fredericks with it. The other general who had remonstrated with the troops for breaking out of barracks received no less summary treatment—Shchepin struck him across the buttocks with the flat of his sword. The soldiers laughed loudly when the corpulent General flung his hands up and ran off, shouting: "Help, murder!"

At last the eight hundred men rushed to the Fontanka and made for Peter Square with loud cheers. In Gorokhovaya Street, to Bestuzhev's surprise, Yakubovich suddenly appeared and ran after the soldiers, cheering, with his cap raised aloft on the point of his naked sword.

There were many old soldiers in the Moscow Regiment who had fought in the heroic battles of 1812. The regiment got its name "Moscow" because of the gallantry it had displayed in the fighting for Moscow. Pestel had begun his military career in that regiment when it was still known as the Lithuanian Regiment. The fact that this gallant regiment, defying the angry order of the brigade as well as the regimental commanders, had rushed out into the square with the regimental colours, made a stunning impression upon the military chiefs. The Chief of Staff reported to the Emperor Nicholas with a look of sheer terror:

"Your Majesty, the Moscow Regiment has mutinied. It has marched out to the Senate—"

"Call the Horse Guards out at once!" Nicholas commanded.

The square was still deserted when the Moscow Regiment approached it. Alexander Bestuzhev, marching at

the head, noted with the observant eye of a writer how significant the oddly solitary statue of Peter looked, towering majestically over the Neva. The wildly rearing iron horse seemed to have frozen in its tracks upon the projecting rock, checked by the imperious hand of the rider in a laurel wreath, whose eyes pierced the veil of time and space.

"You would not greet us with outstretched arm, great autocrat, did you but know that we have come here to fight the autocracy." This thought flashed through Alexander Bestuzhev's mind as he and his brother Mikhail formed the soldiers square around Peter's statue.

"Do you remember, Mikhail," he threw out to his brother, "what an excellent Russian name Pestel gave to this system of offensive operations? Instead of the foreign word *carré*, he suggested *usebron*."

"Do you know," said Mikhail, "I have been thinking of Pestel too. He's the man who ought to be with us now, he's the man who ought to be Dictator by rights."

The Moscow men also occupied the approaches to the Senate leading off St. Isaac Square.

A skirmish line was detailed under the command of the poet Alexander Odoyevsky.

The soldiers were high-mettled and game. They greeted the General whom Nicholas had sent for the Horse Guards with jokes and turned him back. Another General—Bibikov—who tried to force his way through the line, was beaten off with rifle butts. Battle array was quickly restored, however, by officers, who were dressed as for parade.

Alexander Bestuzhev threw off his greatcoat and tossed it into a sleigh. In his dress uniform, buckskins and husar boots he looked dressed for a ball. He unsheathed his sword with a flourish and began to sharpen the blade on the granite of Peter's pedestal.

"Trying to borrow courage from the hero of Poltava, I see?" his brother Mikhail said, smiling.

"How long are we going to stand here, sir?" asked a non-commissioned officer with shrewd and audacious eyes. "The men are complaining about the cold."

"We are waiting for the Prince's orders," answered Alexander Bestuzhev. "The Grenadiers of the Life-Guards, the Naval Guard and others still have to join us."

After a few days' thaw the weather on the eve of December 14th had turned cold. That day there was a sharp frost and a clear sky since early morning.

The city was full of rumours about the new oath of allegiance and all kinds of sensational events. People flocked to the barracks long before daybreak, and at dawn Senate and Palace Squares were crowded. They passed from square to square and gathered in excited throngs. The city was like a seething volcano that would erupt at any moment, and Miloradovich, Governor-General of St. Petersburg, still did nothing to pacify it. That General was distinguished for his bravery in battle and his extraordinary nonchalance in matters that concerned the administration of the city. Only the day before, when his adjutant voiced his anxiety over the unrest among the troops, Miloradovich had cut him short presumptuously with the words: "I know all about it!" And slapping his pocket, he added boastfully: "I have sixty thousand bayonets here. There is no need to fear anything!" All he did was to issue an order to increase the number of mounted police patrols and have the number of men on duty in the government offices doubled.

Miloradovich left his house in full dress uniform with the blue St. Andrew ribbon across his shoulder. His chest was covered with orders and stars, Russian and foreign.

"Trouble is brewing in the city," his adjutant reported.

The Governor-General, however, made no changes in

the day's plans, which he started with an informal visit to Katya Teleshova, the ballerina, on whom he had promised to drop in for a cup of coffee.

At eleven in the morning, when Miloradovich presented himself before Nicholas in Palace Square, his resplendent uniform was unbuttoned and his ribbon rumpled.

"Sire!" he exclaimed, "it was the skirmish line of the insurgents that put my dress in this disordered state. But I am going to have a word with the soldiers this very minute. I will pacify them. I know how to speak to them. I—"

He sprang into a passing sleigh, told his adjutant to jump onto the foot-board behind, and told the cabman to drive across St. Isaac Square.

That was impossible, however, on account of the crowds. Miloradovich and his adjutant made a circuit by way of the Moika and Potseluyev Bridge and drove up to the Horse Guards' barracks. The adjutant went in and told the men to hurry up, but they displayed a suspicious tardiness and pleaded all kinds of excuses. Alexei Orlov, the regimental commander, came galloping up with his adjutant, dismounted in the stable-yard and ordered the Horse Guards out at once, but the regiment did not budge.

Miloradovich, with a fearful oath, seized someone's horse, leapt into the saddle and dashed off. His adjutant ran after him.

Despite his unsuccessful attempt to bring the Horse Guards out into the square the Governor-General lost none of his self-assurance. He rode up to the insurgent regiment, which stood in battle formation round Peter's statue, convinced that he had eloquence enough to pacify the soldiers and restore order. Breaking through the crowd after a hard struggle, Miloradovich rode up to the right face of the *carré* and halted within ten paces of the rebel soldiers. He repeated the command "Atten-shun!"

five or six times in a booming voice until he at last succeeded in drawing notice to himself. Miloradovich possessed a florid eloquence that usually impressed his listeners. By a skillful trick of oratory he revived in the minds of the veteran soldiers scenes of the victorious campaigns which he had been through with them. His speech bade fair to shake the men's resolution.

Obolensky told Miloradovich to withdraw. To push back his horse he prodded it with a bayonet, and grazed the Governor-General's leg in doing so. But Miloradovich, adopting the fatherly tone of an affectionate commander, continued to exhort the soldiers, many of whom had begun to listen to him with sympathetic interest. Thereupon Kakhovsky fired at Miloradovich. The bullet pierced the St. Andrew ribbon and the General's bemedalled chest. Miloradovich slumped from his horse into his adjutant's arms. The latter, without any help from the soldiers, dragged him to the Manège and laid him down straight in the snow. By shouts and kicks he at last forced four of the men to pick up the General and carry him to the Horse Guards' barracks. Here he was laid in the room of an officer who was away on leave.

Nicholas then sent General Voinov to parley with the troops. Voinov set out on horseback, but he was pulled off his horse as soon as he reached the square. Frightened by the fate that had overtaken Miloradovich, he approached the soldiers with a slow unsteady gait, and spoke in a low toneless voice, as if he were dealing with matter-of-fact trifles. And when a voice out of the mass of soldiers shouted to him: "Better get out of the way, General, this is no place for you!", he answered plaintively: "Haven't you the fear of God?" and quietly withdrew. Someone in the crowd threw a billet of wood at him and knocked his cap off.

Nicholas, meanwhile, got to know that more troops were coming out to join the rebels, and he hastily sent

the clergy out to the square. They were his last hope. Metropolitan Serafim of St. Petersburg was to explain to the soldiers that the oath to Nicholas was lawful and correct.

He had only just put on his sacerdotal robes and was about to start a thanksgiving prayer in the palace church in honour of Nicholas's ascension to the throne, and Metropolitan Eugene of Kiev, invested in a purple velvet chasuble, was making ready to officiate with him. The Adjutant-General burst into the church with the royal command and urged the prelates to go out into the square with all haste.

"Quick, time is precious!" he said. "Reason with the men."

This haste was caused by fear lest other troops join the mutineers. Nicholas believed that if the prelates succeeded in persuading the soldiers in the square to return to their barracks, those who came out later to join them would turn back, too.

Thus prodded on, the servants of God made ready in great haste and took with them two deacons. They got into a carriage and rode off with the General on the foot-board behind. The sight of the rebels in battle formation, the noise of the huge surging crowd, and the reports of musket shots terrified the venerable fathers, and they were about to turn back, but Nicholas, himself scared to death, sent his Adjutant-General and the Chief of Police "to implore the holy fathers to perform the exhortation."

"But who am I to go with?" Serafim asked bewildered, glancing fearfully at the crowd.

"With God, father, with God!" a voice in the crowd answered him.

The Metropolitans got out of their carriage and walked towards the rebels.

It was a picturesque spectacle—the white snowy square, the gorgeous vestments of the clergy in green

and purple velvet, the diamond-studded gold crosses glittering in the morning sunshine, and the brocaded surplices of the deacons accompanying the Metropolitan.

Despite the grandeur and impressiveness of the scene, the moment Metropolitan Serafim stepped forward to speak, shouts flew from the ranks of the soldiers:

"You can't fool us any more! Those days are gone!"

The Metropolitan began to urge the men "not to shed the blood of their countrymen." Kakhovsky strode up to him and said angrily:

"We are forced to it by the government! Tell the Tsar's troops better not to attack us, and we shall peacefully voice all our demands! We stand for law and order."

The Metropolitan attempted to argue further, but no one listened to him and his voice was drowned by the beating of a drum. The murmur of the pressing crowd took on a menacing note.

Suddenly a wild cheer resounded through the square. The Moscow Regiment had received reinforcements. Lieutenant Suthoff had brought his company of Grenadier Guards out straight across the ice of the frozen Neva. Overcoming the resistance of the Tsar's troops lining the banks of the river, the Grenadiers, with the audible sympathy of the huge crowd, joined the rebel troops to whom they came up from the right. The Metropolitan and their deacons hastily withdrew to the left through the broken railings and made their way to St. Isaac Cathedral.

Not until they reached Sini Bridge did the holy parlementaires find two izvozchiks who drove them back to the Winter Palace.

The officers of the court ran up to them eagerly for news. "What can you tell us? What is happening out there?"

"They swore at us and drove us away," the Metropolitans answered laconically and glumly.

When Suthoff, brave and buoyant, appeared in the square Kakhovsky rejoiced. "What do you think of my Suthoff?" he cried jubilantly.

"Magnificent!" said Obolensky. "Splendid!"

He himself had joined the Moscow Regiment while it was being led out into the square by the two Bestuzhevs and Shchepin-Rostovsky. Wild with enthusiasm, he had sworn not to leave the square whatever the outcome of the struggle would be.

Shortly after Suthoff's appearance, the Naval Guard, led by Nikolai Bestuzhev, could be seen coming down to the square by way of Galernaya Street.

Hearing the musket reports of the Moscow Regiment, who were repulsing a cavalry attack, Nikolai Bestuzhev had given the order to his Naval Guard: "All out to the square! To the rescue!"

The sailors, without a moment's hesitation, marched out after him in battle order with the banner in front. On reaching the statue of Peter I they formed "in column of attack" between the Moscow Regiment's *carré* and St. Isaac Square, in two platoons—one facing the Admiralty, the other the Manège of the Horse Guards.

Rileyev strode up to Nikolai Bestuzhev and embraced him impetuously.

"Here it is, the moment of our liberty! We have lived for it, and would willingly die for it!"

Arbuzov, laughing, said excitedly: "I was going to order my men to load their muskets, but they had already done so without leave."

Nikolai Bestuzhev looked round the square.

"There are two to three thousand troops in the square," he said. "We could start without wasting time. If we are late with the Senate we must march on the palace! Where is our Dictator?"

"We had a good opportunity of breaking into the Senate and presenting our demands, but we missed it," answered Alexander Bestuzhev. "And now you have a Tsar in the palace, not a claimant to the throne. A Tsar to whom the oath has been taken, Nicholas the First. Besides, we've lost a good deal of time. We shall have to take the palace now by assault, like an enemy stronghold! My duty was to bring the first revolutionary regiment out into the square with my brother Mikhail—and I have done it. Now, like a good soldier, I want to take my orders from the military Dictator we have elected." Then he added with emphasis on each word: "This general subordination is our sole pledge of success. We must act according to circumstances, and orders must be issued by him alone if we are to avoid disturbances."

"But where is he? Where is Trubetskoy?"

"When Rileyev and I visited him this morning, he promised to come out as soon as the troops were mustered," said Pushchin. "Küchelbecker ran down to his house just now, but he is not there. Nobody knows where he has gone. When there were no troops we had a Dictator, and now it is the other way round."

"I will go for him," Rileyev said determinedly, "I am sure he will come, I vouch for it."

The appearance in the square of the spare little Lieutenant Panov at the head of two parties of Grenadiers of the Life-Guards, who had come marching out in a body, was greeted by the troops with enthusiasm.

The officers crowded round Panov and asked him how he had managed to break out of barracks with his grenadiers.

"Nothing could curb the ardour of my men," Panov said. "I stepped to the head with my drawn sword and shouted: 'Follow me, lads!' We overran the platoon that was guarding the exit. The Regimental Commander Stürler was swept aside, and we rushed through the

courtyard of the Winter Palace like an avalanche. I thought our men had already taken the palace, and nearly got caught in a trap—we ran into hostile troops. The Tsar had set a strong guard at the main gates. We crushed them in a hand-to-hand fight. Outside the Headquarters Nicholas himself shouted ‘Stop!’ to us. The cavalry surrounded us. I ran forward and shouted again: ‘Follow me, lads! These are not our men, charge them!’ We fought our way through at the point of the bayonet.”

The officers crowding round Panov embraced him and wrung his hand.

* * *

There was a vast crowd in the square. Ever since the news of Alexander’s death had arrived, the streets and squares had been thronged with people. The excitement reached a high pitch when it became known that the first oath to Constantine was invalid and another oath would be taken, this time to Nicholas. Persistent rumours were afloat that during the performance of the second oath all kinds of privileges and a reduction in the term of military service for soldiers would be announced.

By midday all three squares—Admiralty, Palace and Peter—and the adjoining streets were choked with crowds, which seemed to be more numerous than the troops.

St. Isaac Cathedral was in the course of construction, and piles of logs and granite slabs lay at its base. People climbed up on them, watching the unusual behaviour of the troops, and pretty soon they grasped what was afoot.

Conjecture ran wild among the crowds.

“Under Alexander’s Will the people are to get their freedom, but they’re trying to keep it a secret!”

“Naturally, they’re bound to give folks freedom for 1812. We liberated a foreign people and came home

wounded and all we got for our pains was the same old yoke!"

"The officers sympathize with the people, so they're leading the soldiers out against the second oath, that's what it is."

"And many of the soldiers who are with them fought in 1812, so it's no wonder they stand up for their rights."

Listening to this talk, Obolensky was reminded of Lunin's words: "Our people are thinking, for all that they are silent."

Obolensky was curious to see what kind of crowd it was. His eyes travelled over the disordered surging ranks. There were many workmen, who were building the cathedral, many menials and artisans. There were also no few serfs, who had come to town to earn some money, and women with children in their arms.

These people were not just idle spectators. One and all, they were deeply agitated and full of sympathy.

There was arguing in the crowd, and one could hear shouts and laughter. It was passed from mouth to mouth that a merchant had received two beatings—"one for Nicholas" outside the palace, and "another for Constantine" outside the Senate.

The police were powerless to deal with this spontaneous conflux and made no attempt to keep order.

Meanwhile, upon Nicholas's orders, the government troops drawn up in Senate Square were being steadily reinforced.

The plan for surrounding the rebels was suggested to the Tsar by his generals as soon as the Moscow Regiment had formed square round the statue of Peter. The Tsar gave orders for the infantry and cavalry and later the artillery to be called out. Ordering the company keeping guard at the palace to load their muskets, he led it out through the courtyard himself, at a quick march. The troops, however, had not yet put in an appearance, and

fear made Nicholas resort to a theatrical device for psychologically acting upon the crowd, which kept steadily increasing.

He came out into the square, a handsome swaggering figure, and with the skill for dramatics inherited from his mother, he began distinctly and impressively to read out his own manifesto. When it was at last reported to him that a battalion of the Preobrazhensky Regiment had arrived, he handed the manifesto to his adjutant and went forward to meet the men.

He headed the battalion and led it to the corner of Admiralty Boulevard past the fence of the Finance Minister's house, which was nearing completion. His fear vanished at the sight of Alexei Orlov, who was leading the Horse Guards out into the square. The regiment, under Orlov's command, skirted St. Isaac Cathedral, rode out into Peter Square and drew up to a position of vantage with its back to the house of Prince Lobanov. Nicholas, who had now fully recovered his self-control, gave the order in a stentorian voice:

"Cut off the mutineers, if possible from three sides, and then surround them!"

Orlov ordered the first two lines of horsemen to charge.

The horsemen rushed forward, but people from among the crowd threw themselves at the horses' heads and seized their bridles. Four times the squadron charged, and four times it was stopped by the shots of the rebels and the living avalanche of people.

Nicholas galloped down to the corner of the boulevard to take things in hand himself. Coarse oaths were flung at him out of the crowd and someone shouted:

"Come over here, you pretender. . . . We'll show you!"

Nicholas turned his horse back.

And every time the Tsar attempted to approach the statue of Peter, stones and blocks of wood were thrown at him by the crowd. People smashed the fences around

the cathedral and armed themselves with palings, frozen clods of earth, and snowballs.

The Prince of Württemberg, nephew of the old Empress Maria Feodorovna, dodged a flying missile and said nervously: "The mob is taking an active part in the riot!"

The crowd shouted encouragement to the soldiers and asked to be given weapons.

"It would be a good thing! If you gave us weapons, we would give you a hand: We'd do the job in no time!"

Meanwhile, Trubetskoy, the Dictator and Commander of the rising, was nowhere to be seen.

The rebellious troops, who had been standing in the square since early morning, waiting for other sympathizing regiments to join them, found themselves in a tragic plight. There they were, mustered in the square, an army of nearly three thousand men who could not budge because there was no one to give the command.

Still hoping against hope, they hazarded all kinds of guesses to account for Trubetskoy's continued absence, and expected him to appear at any moment.

* * *

Rileyev rushed about in search of Trubetskoy, turning over in his mind for the hundredth time all their recent conversations and decisions. How did it happen that their common choice had fallen upon that man of all men? But was he not one of the founders of the Salvation League and the Prosperity League! Was he not a member of the Northern Society? And his distinguished military services? The year 1812, his gallant conduct under fire. Yes, Trubetskoy was well known to the soldiers.

But quick upon those thoughts came other disturbing thoughts, bringing with them a sudden realization of how mistaken they had been in their choice. Rileyev began to see things in their true light.

Trubetskoy was furiously opposed to Pestel. Cautious to the point of cowardice, he himself had not enrolled a single member in the Secret Society, or lifted a finger for that purpose.

He shied at the republican tendencies of Rileyev's supporters as well as of Pestel. And his insistence that they should start with an appeal to the Senate—was that not a desire to observe some degree of "legality" even in rebellion? It was sheer cowardice, an attempt to shift responsibility onto the Senate in an affair where revolutionary force alone was called for.

"I cannot find him anywhere!" Rileyev said apologetically to Pushchin, who came forward to meet him. "But I'll find him. I'll fetch him."

"Trubetskoy has hidden himself, the chicken-hearted Dictator!" Pushchin retorted contemptuously.

In fact, Trubetskoy lacked the courage either to come out into the square, or to keep well away from it. He sat motionless, as though in a trance, within two paces of the rebellious troops, and no one thought of looking for him there. He sat brooding in the building of the General Staff exactly opposite the Winter Palace, which, according to his last order of the day before, was to have been already in the hands of the insurgents.

Prince Trubetskoy saw everything from this point of vantage and was waiting all the time for the palace to be attacked, but no attack was undertaken. Finally, the Tsar's infantry and cavalry surrounded the insurgents in a close ring.

Seeing that the plan for the rising was a complete failure, Trubetskoy went to his brother-in-law Lebzeltern at the Austrian Embassy, leaving his contemporaries and future historians to puzzle their minds over the distressing question as to why he, a brave and gallant soldier, had drawn upon himself that most terrible of all accusations—cowardly treachery to the cause he had espoused.

Meanwhile Nicholas had sent a third parlementaire to the insurgent troops—the Grand Duke Michael. The latter had been able to induce the men of the Moscow Regiment who had not broken out of barracks to take the oath, and Nicholas hoped that his brother, being chief of that regiment, which formed the main body of the rising, would discharge his mission successfully.

Michael did not get as far as the Moscow Regiment. He stopped before the column of sailors, who stood in front of the infantry square with their muskets at the ready. Pompously and incoherently Michael began to speak about the oath to Nicholas being lawful. No one listened to him, and the soldiers deliberately made a noise to drown his speech. Pushchin glanced at Küchelbecker's pistol, then pointed to Michael, saying: "Let him have it!"

Küchelbecker pulled the trigger, but his pistol misfired.

Kakhovsky said to the men next to him:

"I am not going to shoot, because it is useless. We are surrounded."

Nicholas sent into the attack not only the Horse Guards, but the Cavalier Gardes and the Horse-Pioneer Squadron.

Surprisingly enough, nearly three thousand picked horsemen were unable to ride down an inferior number of infantrymen, who stood in close order round the statue of Peter I. To a great extent, of course, this was due to an attitude of unconscious, and in some cases quite conscious, sympathy towards the rebels on the part of the attackers.

"You wait, we'll go over to your side as soon as it gets dark!"

"You won't catch us firing at our own people!"

The soldiers all suffered equally from the harsh conditions of military life, and the members of the Secret So-

ciety had been right in saying: "There is hope that the soldiers will understand their own interests and support us."

The "loyal" troops, who would have been ready, perhaps, to join the rebels had the latter moved into the attack, were perplexed to see the Moscow Regiment lined up in the square since eleven in the morning and taking no action, although it was two hours past noon.

They were unaware that the rebellious regiment could not act on its own and was obliged to wait until all the troops who sympathized with the fighters for freedom had mustered in the square.

The enforced idleness of the rebel troops, while damping the ardour of those who secretly sympathized with them, added strength to their enemies. Nicholas was given time to draw the ring closer round the rebels.

After the failure of Michael's errand, and the mortal wound received by Stürler, the commander of the Grenadier Regiment of the Life-Guards, who had been overzealous in his efforts to restore order, Nicholas ordered the cavalry to charge again from all sides. The Horse Guards galloped down to St. Isaac Bridge from the Admiralty, and the Cavalier Gardes from the direction of the Manège. The attack also started from the corner of the Senate facing the Neva, where the Horse Guard Squadron was posted.

Although a prey to growing uneasiness, the rebels withstood the onslaught.

Rileyev's search for Trubetskoy was unsuccessful. A new Dictator had to be elected immediately. A man was mentioned, whose name inspired deep respect and affection—Nikolai Bestuzhev. Moreover, being a staff officer, he stood next in rank to Trubetskoy.

"But I am a naval officer," Bestuzhev said. "I could take command at sea, but on land I haven't the slightest idea how it is done."

Obolensky was persuaded to take over command. As senior-adjutant to the commander of all the Foot Guards, he was well known to the soldiers and his commands were implicitly obeyed.

Obolensky attempted first of all to hold a council of war on the spot, but in vain. His comrades considered the situation hopeless, and saw no good in conferences, however urgent. Obolensky, nevertheless, did not shirk responsibility. An offer being made them to surrender, the rebels rejected it together with the promise of a pardon. General Bibikov, who had been beaten by the soldiers of the Moscow Regiment while attempting to break through the skirmish line, reported to Nicholas: "Obolensky is at the head of the mob!"

Nicholas hated Obolensky. What is more, his fear and exasperation were growing apace. It seemed to him that all the troops were in the plot and that they were only waiting until nightfall to join the rebels against him, and seize the palace, the fortress, and the city.

He had sent messengers for the artillery long ago, but it had only just arrived. Even then, it had come without shells.

"They've done it on purpose!" Nicholas thought with horror. "They are all against me!"

The Izmailovsky Regiment came late too. Nicholas was the chief of that regiment and had worn its uniform throughout the fourteenth of December. He commanded the soldiers of the Izmailovsky Regiment to load their muskets and stand in reserve outside the Lobanov house. As for the Chasseurs of the Life-Guards, who were the last to arrive in the square, he expressed his distrust of that regiment by placing it far back in the rear, opposite Gorokhovaya Street, behind the Guards' Artillery Brigade.

Dusk fell suddenly as it were. By three o'clock the sun had already gone down. The weather turned bad. A cut-

ting wind chilled the people, who had been standing motionless in the open square for so many hours. Every minute the frost stiffened, and there was little snow about.

With the approach of dusk the crowd made ever more frequent attempts to bestir itself. Growing steadily bolder, many of the workmen threw sticks, stones and other missiles at Nicholas and his attendants.

A billet of wood struck the ground under the Tsar's horse and it shied.

"The mutiny may spread to the mob at any minute," Nicholas said, quivering with mingled fury and terror.

"Your Majesty, we shall have to resort to grapeshot, I'm afraid!" General Vasilchikov murmured ingratiatingly, voicing the Tsar's inmost thought.

This decided Nicholas.

"Let Sukhozanet tell them: if they don't lay down arms at once, we'll use grapeshot!" he said firmly.

Sukhozanet, the commander of the Guards' Artillery, was hated among the troops. He had scarcely reached the column of sailors when he was greeted with a stream of curses and a running fire. He beat a hasty retreat, his body bent low over his horse, and the riddled plume of his cap scattering feathers in his wake.

Nicholas's demand for surrender being repeated across the square, the rebels had but one answer: "Shoot!"

In a voice which he tried hard to keep steady so as not to betray his agitation, Nicholas at last gave the order:

"Load the guns with grapeshot! Right flank, fire!"

But the guns were silent, although the order to fire had been repeated by the battery commander. The soldier at the right gun refused to apply the fire to the touch-hole.

"Your Honour!..." he began.

The officer snatched the port-fire out of the gunner's hand and fired the first shot himself.

The soldiers standing around the statue of Peter I responded with a round of musket fire.

People clinging to the window ledges and around the columns of the Senate building and the roofs of the adjacent houses were wounded. There was a crash of splintered glass.

It had grown quite dark, and the bursts of gun-fire, like flashes of lightning, lit up the corpses in the snow, the buildings, and the monument, still surrounded by the square of rebel soldiers, who seemed to have become a part of it.

Altogether seven rounds of grapeshot were fired. After an hour of this deadly bombardment the rebel troops at last gave way and broke ranks. Many soldiers rushed for safety across the frozen Neva.

In vain did Mikhail Bestuzhev, under fire, try to restore order among the troops. A new plan flashed through his mind: to capture the Fortress of Peter and Paul, train its guns upon the palace and start negotiations with Nicholas. The column he had formed was almost ready, when suddenly desperate screams rent the air:

"We're drowning! Help!"

The grapeshot had riddled the ice and cracked it in several places. It gave way under the weight of the mass of men who had stepped upon it and a huge patch of open water had formed on the river. Some of the men managed to crawl ashore; the majority had made for the building of the Arts Academy and were just about to entrench themselves in the courtyard when a squadron of Cavalier Gardes came charging up.

The Bestuzhev brothers—Nikolai and Alexander—did not yield without a fight. They stopped several dozen men and posted them at the narrow entrance to Galer-

naya Street to repulse a possible cavalry attack and protect the retreating men.

In clearing the square of corpses, the police threw both the dead and wounded into the ice holes made in the frozen river.

Benkendorf was sent with six squadrons of the Horse Guards to "round-up the fugitive remnants" of the rebels. After the "round-up" the prisoners were driven into Peter Square, where they were lined up to be sent off to the fortress. Those prisoners found themselves again at the stately monument of Peter I, where only a few hours before they had stood so manfully, with bright hopes and a yearning for victory in their hearts.

The captive rebels were escorted to the fortress by the new Semyonovsky Regiment, which had taken the place of the old regiment cashiered for its mutiny in 1820.

Sitting motionless side by side "like monuments" (to use an expression of Karamzin) on a gilt settee in the deserted Winter Palace were two recent high officers of state. One was the aged Minister of Justice Prince Lobanov-Rostovsky, his shaking head thrown back as if making an important utterance, the other was Arakcheyev, who had just arrived from his country house, although no one here had any further need of him. They looked lost and pathetic—the former through old age, the latter through cowardice.

Meanwhile, in her bed-chamber, the old Empress Maria Feodorovna, surrounded by her weeping daughters-in-law, divided her time between swooning and fits of hysterics, wailing: "What will they say about us now in Europe? What a bloody beginning for his reign!"

At Sini Bridge, several participants of the now historical events of December 14th gathered for the last time in Rileyev's rooms.

Natalia, who had been distracted at the thought that her husband had been killed, was overwhelmed with joy at his sudden reappearance.

Her joy, however, was short-lived. Looking into her husband's care-worn face and tired eyes which were filled with a strange compelling light, she had not dared to ask him any questions. She moved silently about the room, thinking how best she could help him. The first thing he needed was a fire in his study. She lighted it herself without calling the servant. Rileyev smiled gratefully, kissed her and was on the point of saying something when she stopped him: "I understand everything, do not worry about me."

She left the room and shut the door.

Rileyev pulled out the drawers of his desk, ransacked the secret places where he kept papers that might now prove dangerous to himself and others, and burnt them in the fire-place.

Presently Steingel came in, and after him Kakhovsky, pale, haggard, and dishevelled. He sat hunched in a corner, his face twitching nervously, and told the sleepy-eyed Steingel how he had said to the Metropolitan Serafim out in the square: "We have come here not to shed the blood of our countrymen, but to demand law and order from the Senate."

Kakhovsky was labouring under great excitement and spoke without a stop. He related how he had shot at Miloradovich and Regimental Commander Stürler of the Grenadiers and how he had wounded some officer of the Tsar's retinue. He handed Steingel his dagger, and cried: "Here, take it as a keepsake!" Then, his last important task, as it were, accomplished, he fell silent, sunk deep in thought.

Rileyev acted as though he were alone in the room. He went through his papers, looking at nobody, hearing nothing, and burnt them in the fire-place. Retired Cap-

tain of the Cavalry Orzhitsky came in. Rileyev livened up.

"You will leave for Kiev immediately," he said weightily, like a man vested with authority. "Tell Sergei Muravyov all that happened in Senate Square."

This was Rileyev's last order as leader of the Secret Society.

"My brotherly greetings to Pestel," he went on, gripping Orzhitsky's two hands. "And tell him..." he sighed sadly, "tell him that in many ways he was right."

This last thought for the Southern Society and for Pestel expressed, as it were, Rileyev's desire to share with them his final plans, hopes and aspirations.

"Perhaps the Southerners still exist..." He would have added something more, but words failed him.

Orzhitsky went away. Natalia brought in some wood for the fire. Rileyev nodded to her in silence, but did not detain her, and she went out, trying to hide her tears. He continued to look through his diary notes, tearing out some of the pages and burning them. Kakhovsky paced to and fro before the motionless Steingel. Suddenly he stopped and asked irritably: "What are you thinking about, Steingel?"

Steingel raised a pair of surprisingly calm eyes.

"I was thinking how gallantly our square repulsed all the attacks. Just think, we had only about three thousand men, and Nicholas threw against us nine thousand muskets and three thousand cavalry swords." He paused, as though overwhelmed by the vast figure, then brought out slowly, incredulously: "Twelve thousand against three! And the artillery besides...."

Rileyev looked round quickly. His face, flushed from the heat of the fire, looked younger again.

"We did not show the white feather!" he said proudly.

He dropped the tongs and straightened up, and when he spoke again it was in a changed voice, filled with a great sadness,

"But how many mistakes we made! Disastrous mistakes. We should have started the attack ourselves. It was essential, I see that now. Why didn't we?"

Steingel nodded his heavy head in silence. Kakhovsky looked out of the window broodingly.

"And what was the result of that vacillation?" Rileyev resumed in a vibrant voice. "Our inaction paralyzed the sympathizers, prevented them from joining us."

"There were plenty of sympathizers," Kakhovsky said, "but we couldn't very well have the crowd, the people, mixed up in the affair. It would have meant another Pugachov revolt, which would have torn control out of our hands and turned the revolution into an ordinary riot."

Suddenly he caught himself and asked: "But where is Bestuzhev, where is Obolensky?"

"I don't know about Bestuzhev, but I saw Obolensky," answered Steingel. "He was with the sailors, who had kept their ranks even under grapeshot, and he went to the barracks with them."

"We have done what we could," Rileyev said. "It isn't much, perhaps, but the main thing is that it's the start! That means there will be a sequel and victory. We shall pass our powers over to the Southern Society."

* * *

While the leaders of the rising were holding their last free meeting in Rileyev's rooms, the first interrogations were being held in the halls of the Winter Palace, at which it immediately came to light that the rooms of the writer Rileyev had served as the rebels' headquarters.

The Tsar summoned his Aide-de-Camp Durnovo and ordered him to bring "that writer Rileyev" to the palace at once, "dead or alive."

Nicholas was writing a long letter to Constantine when it was reported to him that on the basis of already available evidence Rileyev appeared to be the soul of the movement in the North. Nicholas added to his letter: "I have proof that the affair was directed by a man named Rileyev, a civilian."

In the dead of night Aide-de-Camp Durnovo rode up to Rileyev's house and demanded admission in the name of the Sovereign. The guards accompanying Durnovo—six soldiers of the Semyonovsky Regiment—entered the hall of Rileyev's flat. Rileyev dressed quickly, kissed his wife, but would not have his daughter awakened. He was so calm that for the moment his wife failed to grasp the horror of the situation.

When Rileyev got into the sleigh next to Durnovo a sense of enormous relief and lightness crept over him. Whatever lay in store for him, he had done everything that had needed doing. The troops had come out into the square against the Tsar and his government. The start had been made!

* * *

The bivouac fires around the palace burned all night. Sentries were posted on all the bridges and thoroughfares. The police had the square cleaned and scrubbed, and made the *dvorniks* strew fresh snow over it to give it a clean, innocent and peaceful appearance, and hide the telltale signs of blood that had marked the beginning of the new Russian Tsar's reign.

Nicholas also gave orders for the bullet-riddled walls of the Senate to be plastered at once.

A contemporary, however, remarked that there were still many signs of blood in Senate Square on December 15th. Fearing to record the fact in Russian he made the entry in his diary in impassive Latin: "*Sanguinis multa signa.*"

CHAPTER SEVEN

Elaborate and serious preparations for the rising started among the Slavs after the camp season and their amalgamation with the Southern Society. Two of the most zealous champions of the revolutionary cause were company commanders of the Chernigov Regiment—Solovyov and Shepilo. Every minute of their spare time was devoted to talks with the soldiers, to whom they explained the meaning and aims of the revolution which the Society was planning.

Pyotr Borisov, the life and soul of the Slav League, being a man of foresight, checked the state of the guns and instructed Andreyevich, a devoted member of the Society, attached to the Kiev Arsenal, to make sure that the old charges were replaced by new ones in the ammunition waggons.

No one in the South yet knew that a rising had started in St. Petersburg on the fourteenth of December and was suppressed within six hours in the very same square. During those days only one letter from Bestuzhev-Ryumin in Kiev had reached the Slavs. He wrote with his customary fervour: "Soon we shall be given an opportunity of dying for our country's liberty! Perhaps in February or in March 1826 we shall rally to the banner of freedom at our country's call."

Events, however, caused that banner to be raised much earlier.

Owing to the long distance and bad state of the roads the news of Tsar Alexander's death in Taganrog was ten days in arriving.

Together with this news a rumour reached the Chernigov Regiment that during the ceremony of taking the oath the Tsar's Testament abolishing serfdom and reducing the soldiers' term of military service would be announced.

The Chernigov Regiment was in winter quarters at Vasilkov, thirty versts from Kiev. It was a small town of single-storied houses standing in little cherry orchards, with hollyhocks like gaily dressed girls on holiday, with puddles that never dried, and several buildings two and even three stories high which housed the government offices and military institutions.

In one of the houses, before which stood a black-and-white sentry-box, lived the commander of the regiment, Gustav Gebel. He was a typical militaster, a narrow-minded dull-witted officer of the petty cavilling type so hateful to the Russian soldier. He was not popular in the regiment.

Gebel had just received a judgement from the Army Commander at Mogilyov under which two rank and file offenders were to be punished by flogging. Simultaneously instructions were received ordering the regiment to take the oath to the Emperor Constantine I.

Gebel decided, for the sake of convenience, to execute both orders with the least possible delay, one immediately after the other. There was no sense, he reasoned, in mustering the regiment twice and inviting the priest with his cross each time!

For the purpose of parades, solemnities and public punishments the town had a special square, trodden smooth by soldiers' boots. Not a blade of grass grew upon it, and during the summer parades and reviews clouds of light southern dust hung over it. A little to one side stood the flogging post, called the "horse."

Now, at the beginning of December, this square was lightly covered with snow, and the Chernigov Regiment was drawn up in it to take the oath to the new Tsar.

Colonel Sergei Muravyov, commander of the regiment's Second Battalion, was standing before his men in full dress uniform. His face had a pinched look caused by recent worries and sleepless nights spent in think-

ing what action the Northerners were likely to take upon learning of Alexander's death. A little way off stood the regimental priest, his gold cross and rich vestments, a recent gift from Madame Branicka, the landowner, glittering in the sunshine. That lady, despite her incredible stinginess, made generous gifts from time to time for her soul's salvation either in the shape of vestments for the clergy, or irons for transported convicts.

"She, too, is supporting the regime to the best of her ability," Muravyov thought, and shifting his eyes to the flogging posts, he suddenly saw two soldiers, stripped to the waist, being bound to them.

Only then did he realize that the priest was there for something else besides officiating at the ceremony of the oath. This ceremony was to be preceded by a public flogging.

Muravyov had never been able to stand that brutal punishment, performed with the church's blessing, which often resulted in the soldiers being maimed and even killed.

Now that the time had come for making a bid for freedom against the hateful tyranny, this revolting manifestation of its brutality was particularly unbearable.

The searing lash of the whips on the men's bare backs, the spurting blood, the agonized shrieks of the victims and, next to all this, the glittering gold of the priest's vestments and cross, infuriated Muravyov. It was all he could do to suppress a wild impulse to rush up and stay the hand of the executioner. Iron discipline, which had become second nature, kept him rooted to the spot. Pale, his eyes shut, he thought tensely: "I must save myself for the rising! Here, in this very square, perhaps, this same priest will read a different catechism composed by me, Sergei Muravyov. This new catechism will disperse the darkness of the ages as the sun disperses night. Suffering men will raise their heads, will come

to learn the truth and will take their birthrights. Truth will triumph. I, Sergei Muravyov, will lead yesterday's slaves. . . ."

Unconsciously, he took several steps forward, then suddenly swayed and dropped in a swoon.

Throwing the ranks out of order and ignoring Gebel's shouts, several soldiers ran up to the prostrate Colonel. Muravyov came to himself and met their gaze, full of understanding and sympathy. His heart responded with a wild throb of joy.

The oath to the new Tsar, after a hush of expectancy, produced a low but threatening murmur in the ranks; there had followed no announcement shortening the term of service and abolishing serfdom, which the men had been looking forward to so eagerly.

* * *

Shortly after this event Muravyov received a second letter from Pestel through Kryukov, warning him of the growing danger of exposure and suggesting that they should meet.

He was preparing for that meeting when, like wild-fire through dry forest, burning all hopes and expectations in its path, came the terrible news that Pestel had been arrested.

Muravyov suddenly found himself quite alone. He realized that immediate action was called for, but was undecided what to do. He learned of Alexander Poggio's futile attempt to rouse the Nineteenth Division with the aid of Volkonsky for the purpose of securing Pestel's release, and of Davidov's helpless exclamations: "If only Pestel were with us! What are we without him!" and realized that the Kamenka Branch had ceased to exist.

On December 24th—Christmas Eve—Sergei Muravyov

left hastily for Zhitomir, saying that he would soon return, and was merely going to ask the corps commander to grant Bestuzhev leave to visit his dying mother. Bestuzhev, as an ex-Semyonovsky officer, was under penalty and deprived of regular leave.

On his way to Zhitomir Muravyov received another shock. The Senate courier, whom he met on the road, told him of the recent events in St. Petersburg in detail. The defeat of the Northerners only steeled Muravyov's heart, and his courage, which had begun to fail him, returned stronger than ever. His thoughts took a new turn. This first step, a failure though it was, was important for Russia's future. If Rileyev and Pestel were in prison, at least he, Muravyov, was still at liberty and would raise the banner of revolt.

* * *

Muravyov wanted to send Bestuzhev immediately to St. Petersburg for liaison. He himself hoped, through Poles of his acquaintance, to establish contact with Pestel, who was still in the prison cell of the Bernardine Monastery in Tulchin under a doubled guard.

He was looking forward to another important meeting with a representative of the secret Polish Patriotic Society to discuss joint action. While waiting for that representative Muravyov decided to call on his superior officer Login Rote, Commander of the Third Infantry Corps, on the pretext of applying for Bestuzhev's leave. Lieutenant-General Rote was kindly disposed towards Muravyov on account of his aristocratic birth and excellent command of the French language. He might, incidentally, be able to give him some information concerning developments in the capital.

Rote, a French emigrant, had served with the Prince of Condé before going over to the Russian troops. He

had a native intelligence but no education apart from a worldly training. He was extremely proud, cruel and boastful. Thinking that he was imitating Napoleon's bluff army pleasantries, he would shout at a grey-headed General who had let his hair grow too long:

"I will order you to be given a haircut on a drum!"

He threatened another General before his men:

"I will seat you on a gun!"

General Rote was hated by officers and men alike. He himself hated all Russians who were not of noble birth, like Muravyov, whose speech reminded him of his never-to-be-forgotten Paris.

Rote, by accident, had become associated with General Chernishov's private investigations into the Secret Societies. Maiboroda's lengthy report to the Tsar had gone through Rote's hands as far back as November 26th. He had forwarded it on without realizing its importance, and had so far forgotten its contents that while treating Muravyov to an excellent dinner he had found in him an appreciative audience for his French eloquence and recounted to him with relish the events of December 14th in full detail.

And so General Rote had been notified almost a month before that certain officers of the Ninth Infantry Division were implicated in the "foul plotting." But owing to natural thoughtlessness he had failed to grasp the full import of the information he had received and was now boasting complacently as he refilled Muravyov's glass with champagne:

"I have just sent a letter to the Chief of Staff, Adjutant-General Dibich. I guarantee—" he made a sweeping gesture—"yes, I guarantee to preserve complete law and order, obedience and discipline among the troops of my corps. And for that reason I have abstained from taking any measures of precaution against the so-called conspirators. Ha, ha, ha! They are dreaming of the great French

revolution! In Russia, mind you! But where, I ask you, where is their Mirabeau? Where is their culture?"

Muravyov mechanically pushed his glass of champagne away from him.

"Why do you keep saying 'their'?" he broke in sharply. "I can understand you not counting me among the 'plot-ters,' but after all I am a Russian officer, the same as you are."

The dignity with which Muravyov uttered this speech somewhat disconcerted the General, but he quickly found a host of other subjects to talk about. Among other things, he showed with no little brilliance of wit how the men who had come out into the square on December 14th could have taken the palace and seized the entire capital instead of standing in Peter Square for several hours marking time. He saw his visitor off, highly pleased with himself.

His meeting with Moszynski, the representative of the Polish Patriotic Society, had a disheartening effect upon Sergei Muravyov. The representative already knew all the details of the rebels' defeat, and the arrest of Pestel, Rileyev and many other conspirators; he stated politely but firmly on behalf of the Poles that they were not prepared to rise at present and had adopted a policy of wait-and-see.

"You ought to understand," he said in a tone of sad reproach, "that Poland cannot take needless risks. With us it is win or die."

Through Moszynski Muravyov made the acquaintance of some Sisters of Mercy, and asked them to deliver to Pestel in his prison cell at the Bernardine Monastery a full report concerning the events of December 14th. He then left Zhitomir with his brother Matvei.

Scarcely had Sergei Muravyov gone when that same Christmas Eve all the company commanders of the Chernigov Regiment billeted on the outskirts of Vasilkov re-

ceived orders from Gebel to report immediately at Regimental Headquarters at the head of their companies in order to take the oath of allegiance a second time—this time to Tsar Nicholas.

The Slavs mustered their companies in complete field equipment and fighting trim, and conferred among themselves as to whether they should not stir up the soldiers at once and lead them straight on to Kiev instead of Vasilkov.

This mood among the officers was evoked by the revolt of the Northerners in St. Petersburg on December 14th, news of which had already spread far and wide.

"We are in honour bound to attempt a rebellion, too, and prove that the ideas of the Secret Society are still alive!"

Thus spoke Pyotr Borisov, and his friends echoed those sentiments. But when, early the next morning, all the companies of the Chernigov Regiment rallied in Vasilkov, the Slavs' original resolve was shaken by after-thoughts. "But what if we meet no sympathy in Kiev? Shall we not be doing harm to the common cause, and spoiling the already existing plan of the Secret Council, the common plan that will soon be known to us, too?"

And the Slavs decided to abstain from independent action until Sergei Muravyov returned.

The second oath, following so quickly upon the first, evoked unconcealed disgust. The soldiers stood sullen-faced, and not only refused to repeat the words of the oath after the priest, but did not listen to him. The officers expressed their indignation openly: "Today we take one oath, tomorrow another!" The discontent became general. Something unusual was expected to happen. It seemed as if the citadel of tsarism, in which men's minds and wills had been entombed for ages, were tottering at last.

The oath to Nicholas was taken at ten o'clock in the morning of December 25th, and the regiment was immediately dismissed. The members of the Secret Society arranged to stay in Vasilkov. Soon after the oath the soldiers received leave of absence and were warned to report in full fighting trim at the first call. To the great moral satisfaction of the Slavs, the soldiers answered: "We shall report wherever you tell us. You need not worry."

That evening a ball was to be held at the house of Regimental Commander Gebel. He had invited all the officers, townspeople of his acquaintance and the local gentry. The crowd was an unusually large one, as the landowners came to the ball with all their daughters and families in a body, and the townspeople brought their friends with them. The military band played with tremendous gusto, and the dancers footed it without seeming to tire.

Everyone was anxious to forget himself, to slip back into the old habitual mood with those little joys and simple vanities that form the customary setting of provincial life. Since Alexander's death matters of state importance had eclipsed all other affairs and thoughts in the provincial beehive, and this unwonted strain in a life that had always pursued a quiet humdrum tenor was found extremely irksome.

The general opinion was expressed by the Town Governor's wife, who, bewildered by the repeated oath, alarms and rumours, had said: "The earth has been resting on three whales since the beginning of time, and please God it stays that way."

That night at the regimental ball everyone wanted to enjoy himself, throw off all cares and worries. Old and young abandoned themselves to the dance. No less animated than the dancers were those sitting at the green card-tables that were set out in profusion in the drawing-room adjoining the hall.

Even the numerous members of the Slav League, who had come to the ball in dress uniform, bore themselves with an air of careless ease, so as to lull suspicion, and vied with the town dandies in taking care that none of the dressed-up young ladies sat out a single dance. Sub-lieutenants, who had been to the capital, emulated the old men in the performance of the intricate dance steps of the mazurka. They stamped their feet with a dashing ring of spurs, and excited universal admiration.

The merry guests could hardly believe their eyes when the doors were flung open and two figures in greatcoats and gendarmes' helmets appeared upon the threshold like grim statues. The band went on playing unchecked.

"Mummers!" squealed a portly lady in blue.

"Oh, I think I know you!" another lady murmured coquettishly to one of the gendarmes.

"Haven't the honour," the gendarme answered curtly, and ran his eyes inquiringly over the officers.

"Who is the commander of the Chernigov Infantry Regiment?" he demanded.

"I am, Lieutenant-Colonel Gebel," that officer answered from the other end of the hall quite in the manner of a schoolboy caught red-handed.

The guests fell back startled and bewildered. Gebel crossed the deserted parqueted floor towards the gendarmes with uncertain steps. The members of the Slav League stood in a knot of silent expectation.

"I have come to see you on important secret business," the senior gendarme officer said to Gebel.

Gebel made a sign to the band and the music broke off in the middle of a bar. Amid a tense hush the gendarmes followed the host into his study.

Presently Gebel recrossed the hall with the two gendarmes, put on his fur coat in the ante-room, and all three dashed off in sleighs to the outskirts of the town to make a search of Sergei Muravyov's rooms.

Like a beehive disturbed by a rude hand, the hall hummed with the exciting news. Gebel had received orders to arrest the most distinguished officer of the Chernigov Regiment—Sergei Muravyov.

Many of Gebel's guests loved and respected Muravyov, and the local landladies, mothers of marriageable daughters, considered him a most eligible young man.

Exclamations could be heard:

"Thank God he has gone away! Perhaps he will escape abroad!"

The members of the Slav League attending the ball had no opportunity of warning Bestuzhev-Ryumin, who was spending the night in Muravyov's rooms, to hide or destroy incriminating documents.

* * *

The members of the Secret Society were faced with a dilemma: either to march on Kiev without delay with as many regiments as they could raise and risk the consequences, or wait for news about Muravyov's fate.

Within two days Andreyevich arrived post-haste from the Kiev Arsenal with letters from eye-witnesses describing recent events in St. Petersburg. The dreadful details of the disaster had a depressing effect upon the Slavs. They learned that the new Tsar had used grapeshot against the soldiers, hundreds of whom had been drowned in attempting to escape across the frozen Neva.

Andreyevich had letters for Muravyov, which he wanted to deliver in person. And so, without stopping a minute to rest, he set off again in search of him.

Three sledge parties were racing along the Zhitomir road in pursuit of Muravyov—those of Gebel, Bestuzhev-Ryumin and Andreyevich.

Sergei Muravyov, meanwhile, was approaching the village of Lyubar, where his cousin, Artamon Muravyov,

who had recently received the Akhtirka Regiment, was stationed with his hussars.

Sergei rode in a closed sleigh together with his brother Matvei. He drew his greatcoat closer about him for warmth and snuggled against the shoulder of his elder brother.

"I am not expecting miracles, Sergei," his brother said sadly. "I don't think that our cousin Artamon will go and raise his regiment tomorrow. He is no hero himself."

"Don't let doubts dampen your ardour, Matvei. Doubts are the death of brave deeds! The thing is to *dare*—just remember how powerfully that word sounded on Rilev's lips. It is the most important thing today, our only pledge of victory."

"A lot of good that word did our comrades in Peter Square under the guns of the new Tsar!" Matvei said with bitter irony. But his brother did not seem to hear him. He squeezed his hand and said with deep conviction:

"We must raise the three regiments of the hussars as quickly as possible. They are all here, near at hand. The Alexandriisky and Alexopol Regiments will, of course, join the Akhtirka. I'll set the regiments marching on Zhitomir, and we shall arrest the whole Corps Headquarters before the authorities realize what has happened."

The sleigh drew up at the house of the regimental commander in Lyubar.

Artamon Muravyov opened the door himself. He looked haggard and had lost his usual jaunty air. His bland face with its cloying good looks, which had earned him the nickname "cupid," looked faded, and his eyes were shifty and frightened. Not a single feature of this somewhat stupid man betrayed either courage or energy.

Sergei Muravyov glanced at him as if he had never seen him before, and lowered himself into an arm-chair with his elbows resting on a smoking-table. Matvei sat

down opposite and stared bleakly at Artamon, who was busy throwing some papers into the fire.

"He must have dismissed all his orderlies, that's why he opened the door himself," the thought flashed through his mind. "Afraid of witnesses. Late precautions!"

Sergei finally broke the silence in a stern voice that did not sound like his own.

"You understand, Artamon, what we have come to see you about. The hour has struck for fulfilling our pledge." With a gesture that swept aside all objections, he rose from his chair and repeated: "Yes, the hour has struck. Raise your regiment at once. And here are two notes, one for Spiridov, the other for Tyutchev. That is all they are waiting for. They will bring their men here immediately. Send the notes with a trusty messenger."

Sergei Muravyov waved the notes in front of Artamon's face. The latter took them mechanically. Suddenly he drew a deep shuddering breath, and threw both notes into the fire.

"I can't do it!" he cried shrilly, burying his face in his hands. "I can't lead men to certain death! The fourteenth of December has opened my eyes to the madness of it!"

Sergei Muravyov turned deathly pale and seized the tongs. Matvei, knowing his brother's fiery temper, went up to him quickly. But the latter merely dashed the tongs to the floor and turned upon Artamon fiercely.

"Didn't you promise time and again to do what no one asked you to?" he demanded in a suppressed voice. "Didn't you boast that you would be the first? What are you up to now?"

"I am going to St. Petersburg at once," Artamon began breathlessly, sobbing. "I'll tell the Emperor everything about the Society. With what a noble aim it was founded; what our object is. . . . I am sure that when the Emperor learns of our patriotic intentions he will let us keep our places. And we shall find men in St. Petersburg

to intercede for us. The fourteenth of December has ruined everything, everything. . . .”

He threw himself on the sofa in a paroxysm of grief. Sergei Muravyov stared at him dumbfounded.

“We were mistaken in you, Artamon,” Matvei said scornfully. “It is all over between us.”

The brothers left without a word of farewell and rode away in the same sleigh.

The horses sped down the road, kicking up a snowy dust. Sergei Muravyov sat silent and brooding. One more hope had been suddenly and rudely dashed by Artamon’s faint-heartedness.

The only effectual plan had been to raise the Akhtirka Regiment, to win over the Alexopol and Alexandriisky Regiments, seize all the chiefs of the General Staff at Zhitomir, then march on to Kiev and send messengers to St. Petersburg and Moscow. Now some other plan would have to be devised. Meanwhile, precious time had been lost, and no one could make up for that.

But when Matvei, crushed by a sense of defeat worse than death itself, took his brother by the shoulder and said: “Don’t you see, Sergei, all is lost! To begin the rising now would mean shedding men’s blood for nothing. Is it worth it? Better let us go forward to meet our fate and shoot ourselves”—Sergei roused himself. His brother’s words had quite the opposite effect to the one intended. A minute before crushed and broken, his spirits rose at once, and he was as full of enthusiasm and energy as ever.

“No, Matvei, we must not die, we must fight and win!” Sergei said in a tone so joyful that his disconsolate brother started, fearing that these shocks had unhinged his mind. But Sergei continued firmly and rationally:

“We must fight on, fight till the last breath! And as for blood, Matvei, every drop shed in fighting for a just cause is not wasted, but a victory won. If not now, then

in the future. Life will not end with us, you know. That much I believe, that much I know. And not a word of faint-heartedness!"

He peered into Matvei's face in the dark and squeezed his arm.

"And now, Matvei, we must hasten to my Chernigov Regiment. It will take upon itself the role of the Akhtirka Regiment. I will make good Artamon's breach of faith. We, the Chernigov men, will start the rising."

* * *

The officers left at Vasilkov were waiting impatiently for Muravyov to give the signal for the rising, and were overjoyed when, late in the night, a soldier arrived from the village of Trilesy, where Kuzmin's company was quartered, and handed the company commander a note from Muravyov.

"Dear Kuzmin," it ran, "I have arrived in Trilesy and put up at your lodgings. Come down yourself, and tell Baron Solovyov, Shepilo and Sukhinov that they should come and see me without delay."

On the assumption that Muravyov might be arrested before they arrived in Trilesy the officers took certain precautions. Two of them travelled by the high-road, and two by the country-track. There was no other means of communication between Vasilkov and Trilesy.

Trilesy, meaning Three Woods, whither the officers of the Chernigov Regiment hastened to meet Muravyov, was a large village within fifty versts of Vasilkov. Of the dense woods from which the village got its name not a trace now remained. All the trees had been cut down, and people were too lazy to plant new ones.

Here Gebel had recently transferred Company Five of the Chernigov Regiment, whose soldiers he considered mutinous and whose commander—Lieutenant Kuzmin—

was suspect. At such a disturbing time as those last few weeks had proved to be, Gebel thought it judicious to keep that company out of harm's way.

The Muravyov brothers arrived in Trilesy together. Bestuzhev-Ryumin had been sent to notify Colonel Pikhachov, the Commander of the Artillery Horse Company, that the rising had started.

The brothers made themselves comfortable in Kuzmin's little cottage. It consisted of a large airy room and a kitchen, the latter being occupied by the sentry squad and its chief, the grey-whiskered Sergeant-Major Mikhei Shutov.

The latter was a remarkable man. Knowing full well that he had been promoted to the rank of officer, and that the promotion order had already been received at Divisional Headquarters, he nevertheless took an active part in preparing the rising and became an important aid to the officers of the Chernigov Regiment.

Long years of harsh soldiering had not bent or broken him. And now, at long last, when he had received his freedom and independence, he sacrificed them of his own accord to the struggle for his country's liberty.

Sergei Muravyov was very fond of Shutov and was convinced that Company Five would be a strong support to the rising. It would, of course, rouse the Chernigov Regiment, and that would be the beginning. And a good beginning was half the battle.

That night in Kuzmin's cottage, spent in earnest friendly talk with Shutov, hopes, self-confidence and faith in the soldiers' support were revived anew. Even Matvei Muravyov, forever a prey to doubts, cheered up noticeably.

While waiting for the officers from Vasilkov, Sergei Muravyov fell asleep with a light heart, as he used to do in his youth after successfully passing his examinations. But then how strange and unexpected was his awakening!

He dreamt of a camp-fire in the woods. He went up to it and was just going to sit down near it when Colonel Gebel, lit up by the flames, suddenly got up from the ground. Muravyov awoke that instant and saw the living Colonel standing before him, clad in a warm great-coat, with a lighted candle in his hand.

Muravyov stared at him sleepily. Gebel put the candle on the table, picked up a loaded pistol that lay on it, examined it and blew off some powder. Then he put the pistol back and said in a peremptory tone: "This is no place for a loaded pistol. There are no highwaymen here, I trust?"

After a slight pause he announced in a more solemn tone of command:

"Lieutenant-Colonel Muravyov, you and your elder brother are arrested by His Majesty's order!"

Lang, a tall gendarme officer, came into the room. He had arrived together with Gebel, bearing a warrant for the arrest of Bestuzhev-Ryumin. Aware as he was of the close friendship between Bestuzhev and Muravyov, he decided not unreasonably to set about his search in contact with Gebel. "Where there is Muravyov, there you will find Bestuzhev," he thought.

Lighting his cigarette at Lang's, Gebel jerked his head towards his prisoners and said with a complacent laugh:

"Although the proverb does not advise going after two birds, you and I will set a new example by killing three with one stone!"

After a while Sergei Muravyov found amusement in the stupid blunders Gebel was making. The man was utterly ignorant of the relations that existed between his prisoners and the soldiers.

Gebel set over him and his brother Matvei a guard from Company Five, whose soldiers had been designed for front-rank prominence in the event of a rising. As for

Mikhei Shutov, whom Gebel had put in charge of the whole guard, he was no less alive to the necessity of fighting for his rights than the foremost members of the Secret Society, and was prepared to give his life for the cause of liberty. He knew perfectly well that in the event of failure he had twelve thousand strokes of the rod to look forward to, and if he survived that punishment, penal servitude in Siberia for life.

Such was "the reliable guard" set outside all the windows and doors of the house in which the "state criminals" were held in custody.

Neither did Gebel suspect that, before his arrival, Muravyov had sent a note to Vasilkov with a Chernigov officer asking his associates to come and see him without delay. Highly pleased at having so satisfactorily carried out the order for the arrest of the Muravyovs, Gebel settled himself comfortably on the sofa to drink tea. Meanwhile Shepilo and Kuzmin, the first of the four officers who had left Vasilkov, arrived at Trilesy.

Kuzmin caught sight of the guard as he drove up to his lodgings.

"I thought so," he said. "Gebel is here already, but luckily the prisoners are here too."

"We must kill that fellow Gebel!" said Shepilo, but Kuzmin checked him.

"Until Sukhinov and Solovyov arrive we must not give ourselves away."

When the officers came in Gebel took them to task. He railed at Kuzmin for having absented himself from the company, and scolded Shepilo for having come uninvited.

"It is outrageous!" Gebel said angrily. "I reprimand you for it."

He vaguely suspected that something was amiss and wanted to detain the officers with his grumblings until the arrival of Lang, whom he had sent to get the horses ready.

The officers stood before him stiffly at attention. He sat slowly sipping his tea with rum and did not invite them to sit down.

The door opened slightly and a soldier of Kuzmin's company gave the prearranged signal indicating that the other officers had arrived. Shepilo slipped out unnoticed to meet the arrivals, while Kuzmin remained standing in front of the Colonel in an attitude of profound deference.

"I have appointed your Sergeant-Major Shutov chief of the guard," he said, pouring some more rum into his tea. "Can you vouch for him?"

Kuzmin, without turning a hair, answered confidently: "As I would for myself, sir."

"He is as good as an ensign already," Gebel said, somewhat mollified. "I have seen the promotion list."

While Kuzmin was lulling Gebel's suspicions by inventing favourable testimonials for the non-commissioned officers and soldiers of his company, Shepilo met Sukhinov and Solovyov outside the gate.

"Gebel has arrested the Muravyov brothers and is going to remove them," he told the officers. "He has ordered the horses already."

"We'll bayonet that Gebel like a dog if need be," Sukhinov said, infuriated, and all went inside.

Gebel leapt to his feet in dismay at the sight of the officers, but to conceal his consternation he started to shout, mingling Russian oaths with German. Solovyov, Kuzmin and Sukhinov, ignoring him, went into the kitchen to notify the guard that the rising had started. Gebel made a movement to follow them, but Shepilo barred his way and shut the door in his face. Suddenly Gebel stopped swearing, and no longer concealing his fright, pleaded with Shepilo through the door:

"My dear Lieutenant Shepilo, come to your senses, man! Stop your *Kamaraden* if they are up to any mis-

chief. I am your commander, your military father. If I scold you, like children, it is for your own good."

In the large kitchen, separated from the room by a passage, the three Chernigov officers told the soldiers that the hour for the rising had struck at last, and they were to start by arresting their commander Gebel.

"That will serve him right! You can count on us!" the soldiers said.

Shepilo and Solovyov went out into the passage to discuss their immediate course of action, when suddenly the street door opened and admitted the gendarme officer Lang. He came in a hurry to report to Gebel that the horses were ready.

Thinking that Lang had been eavesdropping, Sukhinov seized a musket and levelled the bayonet at the officer's chest.

"Don't kill him," Solovyov said. "It will be enough to arrest him."

Terrified out of his wits, Lang took to his heels. The officers caught him and with the help of the soldiers locked him up in the cellar. Shepilo, who was with Gebel, left the room to find out what was going on.

Left by himself, Gebel began to call Lang at the top of his voice. Receiving no answer, he stole into the guard-room and ran into Shepilo and Kuzmin, who, having split the men up into two platoons, were giving them orders to start action.

Gebel flew into a rage and began to hurl coarse abuse at the officers. This was more than Shepilo could stand. He lunged at Gebel with his bayonet, and Solovyov knocked the Colonel down. Losing no time, Sergei Muravyov smashed the window-pane with his fist and sprang out into the yard.

Leaving the unconscious Gebel, whom they took for dead, the officers of the Chernigov Regiment hastened to join the soldiers. In the bustle and noise no one noticed

that Gebel had come to himself and crawled out into the roadway, where he was picked up by a passing traveller. He was taken to the nearest inn, and thence urgently conveyed to a surgeon to be given first aid. Volunteers were even found to convey the wounded commander of the Chernigov Regiment to his lodgings in Vasilkov.

Before entering the hospital Gebel, mustering all his powers, gave his assistant strict orders to strengthen the guards in Vasilkov and place the mutineers under arrest as soon as they showed up in the town. Gebel's assistant was Major Trukhin, a man celebrated throughout the army for his fondness for the bottle. Trukhin took over command of the Chernigov Regiment. Scared to death himself, he frightened the inhabitants by doubling the town's guards. He dispatched orders to all the companies scattered throughout the neighbouring villages to rally in Vasilkov.

Solovyov and Shepilo, who, on Muravyov's orders, were going back to join their companies, stopped on the way in Vasilkov at the lodgings of the regimental quartermaster.

Upon learning of this, Trukhin with a detachment of the interior guard, the Town Governor and the duty officer of the guard, Lieutenant Bistritsky—a secret adherent of the revolutionary cause—came to the house where Solovyov and Shepilo were waiting for a relay of horses.

Throwing up his beak-shaped nose whose high colour betrayed its owner's bibulous passion, Trukhin solemnly announced:

"Lieutenant Bistritsky, I order you to go immediately to the village and take over Lieutenant Solovyov's company. He is unworthy of the trust. You will bring the company to Vasilkov without delay!"

"That suits us perfectly!" Solovyov whispered aside to Bistritsky, who answered with a slight nod.

The Major gave strict orders to the guard-house where Solovyov and Shepilo were to be confined that no one was to be allowed to see the prisoners or talk with them, and they were to be shot down at the first attempt to escape.

"Why should you escape?" one of the guards said with a grin. "As soon as Colonel Muravyov turns up we'll join him all together."

The guards surrounded the officers and began eagerly asking them questions about what had happened at Trilesy.

Muravyov meanwhile had reached the village of Kovalyovka within thirty-five versts of Vasilkov. He summoned the sergeant-major and non-commissioned officers of the Second Grenadier Company in order to learn the designs and temper of the soldiers. Upon being told that all were prepared to follow him to a man, Muravyov gave orders to march out.

Muravyov's orders for the members of the Secret Society of the Eighth Artillery Brigade and Eighth Infantry Division to take up arms were sent to the Slavs by special messenger.

An intelligent non-commissioned officer by the name of Kakaurov was sent to Belaya Tserkov, where the Seventeenth Chasseurs' Regiment was stationed, with orders for one of the officers, a member of the Secret Society, to report at Vasilkov for further instructions.

Mikhail Bestuzhev-Ryumin arrived in Kovalyovka. He had visited the regiments in the neighbourhood and obtained the consent of many of the commanders to join the rising as soon as Muravyov gave the signal.

Forces were being drawn up at Kovalyovka. Lieutenant Kuzmin arrived with part of his company. Fearing to leave Muravyov without cover, he had come with the soldiers he had been able to muster on the spot without waiting until his Fifth Musketeers' Company, scattered

throughout the villages, rallied in full complement. Before leaving Trilesy, Kuzmin had summoned Sergeant-Major Shutov and said to him:

"Will you bring the rest of the outfit straight up to Vasilkov?"

"I will, sir," Shutov had answered with alacrity.

"Don't turn aside, not even if you meet the devil himself!"

"No, sir, we won't turn an inch!" Shutov answered cheerfully.

Early in the morning on December 30 Sergei Muravyov marched out of Kovalyovka at the head of the First Grenadiers' Company and the greater part of the Musketeers' with the intention of covering the 35 versts to Vasilkov in a single march.

When Major Trukhin got to know of this, he ordered the alarm to be sounded and the Fourth Musketeers' Company, which was on guard duty, to prepare for action. The terrified inhabitants of the little town locked themselves up in their houses behind closed shutters. The town suddenly seemed to have died out.

At three o'clock the vanguard of Muravyov's troops under the command of Lieutenant Sukhinov calmly entered the town and reached the square unmolested.

The cheerful peaceful aspect of the rebel troops excited curiosity and sympathy among the enheartened townsfolk. Crowds began to gather in the square.

Trukhin, pot-valiant after a heavy bout, went up to the "mutinous vanguard" with a challenging air, accompanied by a drummer, and addressed the soldiers at a respectable distance on the subject of subordination to the proper authorities.

He pleaded and threatened, then, incensed by the men's laughter, he carried his homily to such close quarters that Bestuzhev and Sukhinov, making fun of his air of drunken importance, pushed him into the thick of

the column. The mood of the soldiers underwent a sudden change. Breaking ranks, they caught hold of Trukhin, ripped off his epaulets and uniform and tore them into shreds.

It would have gone ill with Major Trukhin had not Sergei Muravyov appeared upon the scene. He checked the soldiers, and ordered the Major to be confined in the very guard-house to which he had only recently sent the officers of the Chernigov Regiment. The Major was instantly sobered and left speechless with amazement and fury when the Fourth Musketeers' Company and the Sixth Company which had gone to relieve it on guard duty both appeared in the square captained by the Major's former prisoners Solovyov and Shepilo, and amid laughter and rejoicings, joined Muravyov's rebels.

Trukhin was led off, dumbfounded, to the guard-house.

To crown all the joys of that happy day, Second-Lieutenant Vadkovsky, the younger brother of Fyodor Vadkovsky who had been betrayed by non-commissioned officer Sherwood, arrived from Belaya Tserkov.

Vadkovsky reported to Muravyov that one battalion of the Chasseurs was ready, and that he would bring it down to Vasilkov himself as soon as he got back to Belaya Tserkov.

Muravyov took the town without hindrance. He summoned to the square the town's distinguished citizens and explained to them the aims and causes of the rising, which in no way threatened their security and property. He assured them in a kindly and noble speech that law and order would be strictly enforced, and asked them to provide the soldiers with provisions and vodka.

The inhabitants' fears were set at rest. The young people were delighted. Supplies were provided immediately. The soldiers were billeted, and a line of strong outposts was set up around the town.

That first day of victory was crowned by one more joyous event: at eight o'clock in the evening the grey-whiskered Sergeant-Major Mikhei Shutov arrived in Vasilkov with the remaining soldiers of the Fifth Musketeers' Company which Lieutenant Kuzmin had left in his charge.

Muravyov listened to Shutov's report with a thrill. The man's voice rang with pride when he narrated what had befallen him on the way.

"About seven versts short of Vasilkov General Tikhanovsky, Commander of the Ninth Division, overtook us and shouted at me something fierce. 'Stop!' he says. 'Where the devil are you going?' 'Your Excellency,' I says, 'we're going to join up with our unit in Vasilkov.' 'D'you know what's afoot in your regiment?' 'Yes, sir, I do. That's why we're going there. To join forces, you know.' The general got all red in the face, and yells: 'Off you go to Divisional Headquarters!'"

Shutov's grey moustaches twitched with a mocking smile.

"And what did you tell Tikhanovsky?" Muravyov asked, lost in admiration of the old soldier.

"The gist of our reply, sir, was that we couldn't go back on the promise we had given our esteemed Company Commander, Lieutenant Kuzmin, and our no less esteemed Battalion Commander, that's to say, you, sir, Colonel Muravyov."

"And what did the General say to that?"

"He started arguing, then threatening, and promised each of us twelve thousand strokes of the rod, and me the rope round my neck. But the boys did not turn a hair. They came down to Vasilkov with me to the last man. As a matter o' fact, sir," Shutov added confidentially, "I had a mind to arrest that General Tikhanovsky, but I didn't dare to do it without your orders."

Muravyov was silent for a minute.

"Do you know, Shutov," he said, and his voice shook

with emotion, "do you know that you have been promoted to ensign? The order is at Divisional Headquarters, but hasn't been promulgated yet."

"Yes, sir, I know it," Shutov answered cheerfully. "Order dated December 3rd, 1825. Now it will be countermanded, sir, I daresay."

"And do you know what punishment you will suffer in case we fail?" Muravyov asked in a low voice.

"To be sure—the firing squad, sir. And if the sentence is commuted, I'll get twelve thousand strokes of the ramrod, as the General promised."

Muravyov embraced the old man and shook his hand warmly.

"Didn't your nerve fail you? Don't you value your life?"

"Just as much as you do, sir," Shutov answered simply, and as though embarrassed at taking up so much of his commander's time and attention, he hastened back to his company on the plea of urgent business.

"What a man, my God, what a man!" Muravyov said to the officers, thinking of the old sergeant-major with admiration.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Bestuzhev had joined Muravyov's detachment before it entered Vasilkov, and had helped to seize the town. Now he was making his report to the council of war which the rebel officers were holding.

The main question under discussion was whether to march immediately on Kiev or carry out the original plan of moving on Zhitomir via Brusilov.

"The Kremenchug Infantry Regiment is stationed in Brusilov, and its commander Nabokov is an old Semyonovsky officer who can be relied upon," Bestuzhev said to the assembled members of the Society.

"Did he promise you anything definite?" Sergei Muravyov asked him.

Bestuzhev hesitated.

"Strictly speaking, no," he answered uncertainly. "He can't make up his mind, although I argued with him all the time. But then there's Pikhachov, Commander of the Fifth Horse-Artillery Company—he is as firm as a rock, and he has cannon. Remember how ardently he swore in the camp last summer that the honour of firing the first shot for his country's liberty belonged to him! Surely, all together we shall succeed in winning Nabokov round."

"And there's the Eighth Brigade near Zhitomir too," said Muravyov. "In Kiev, on the other hand, everything is so indefinite. We shall first have to find out how things are there."

All agreed with that argument, and Muravyov there and then ordered Mozalevsky to go to Kiev and reconnoitre.

"Take three trustworthy men with you," said Muravyov. "Disguise yourselves as peasants, or at any rate, take off your shoulder straps. You will deliver the letters I give you in person. And leave these about where people can find them." He handed Mozalevsky some copies of his catechism in whose wonder-working powers he still fondly believed. "All the rebel companies in Kiev are to join us in Brusilov," he concluded.

"I am honoured by your trust," Mozalevsky said enthusiastically. It was decided that he was to take three loyal soldiers and a non-commissioned officer with him.

In the evening of December 30th Muravyov ordered the colours to be carried out of the regimental commander's lodgings and handed over to the ranks. The troops were to be mustered in the square, where not long ago they had taken two successive oaths to two Tsars.

The next day the new revolutionary catechism was to be read out to the troops there. Sergei Muravyov was

confident that this would open all men's eyes to the righteousness and even sacredness of the struggle they had started against the government, and that the unquenchable flame that burned so high in his own breast would be kindled in the hearts of all men. What seemed to Matvei Muravyov a beautiful but utterly childish dream, was to Sergei Muravyov positively real and attainable. And for him the events then taking place in Vasilkov were, if not an actual victory, at least a solemn and universal triumph.

Indeed, the swift march from Trilesy to Vasilkov, where all the rebel companies had rallied, augured well the bold revolutionary plan. Muravyov found in Sukhinov an excellent assistant. He kept strict discipline among the troops and saw to it that the order forbidding the soldiery to offer injury or insult to the civil population was rigidly enforced. In fact, no complaints whatever were lodged by the inhabitants of the town.

It gave Muravyov pleasure to realize that his choice of Vasilkov as the rallying point had been a happy one. From here the roads lay open to Kiev, and Belaya Tserkov, and Zhitomir. And he had done right in sending Mozalevsky to Kiev to ascertain the revolutionary mood among the garrison and the population, and to find out what commanders the government had appointed against the rebels. This last consideration Muravyov discussed with Sukhinov, who called on him in the evening.

"A good deal depends upon our having friends among those commanders," he said. "When we meet them they will make their regiments go over to our side."

"You still have the wrong idea, Sergei Ivanovich," Sukhinov said reproachfully. "Don't the rank and file count just as much as the commanders in this business? Hasn't the example of Shutov convinced you yet? Why, with men like him in charge you could depend on the soldiers to carry on themselves, commanders or no com-

manders. That is what happened in our Eighth Artillery Brigade, where the Slavs had great influence. But things may prove quite different in other regiments, if the officers who share our views are suddenly removed and replaced by men who are hostile to our aims. We cannot afford to lose time."

"Tomorrow the revolutionary catechism will be read in the square, and after that we march out for Motovilovka," said Muravyov. Giving Sukhinov no time to remonstrate, he handed him the cherished document and added: "Please study it well—Bestuzhev and I wrote it together. Tomorrow you will officiate with me. If there's anything the men do not understand, please explain it to them!"

Sukhinov looked away in silence.

"I don't mean to offend you, Sergei Ivanovich," he said at last, "but to tell you the truth I don't quite understand your catechism myself. I read it...."

"What is it exactly you don't understand?" Muravyov asked, somewhat taken aback.

"I know what you wanted to say," Sukhinov said with a gentle smile, and the sudden sparkle in his eyes showed how deeply he loved Muravyov. "You wanted to give the meaning of our rising in a few words. All the questions and answers in your catechism pursue that one aim, don't they? But what does the soldier care about King Saul, about God's own attitude towards the monarchy, when what he wants above all else is a plain word reducing his term of military drudgery and emancipating the peasants?"

"A man should be actuated not by thoughts of future benefits, but by a yearning for freedom, a consciousness of his own rights," Muravyov said with such fervid faith that the remonstrance died on Sukhinov's lips.

He could not quite make Sergei Muravyov out, but the man's magnificent heroism and readiness to sacrifice

himself overawed him, and he could but bow his head in silent submission.

"You need not worry, Sergei Ivanovich, I shall explain it to the soldiers as best I can," he said in a conciliatory tone and went out with the catechism.

Muravyov followed him out with his eyes and continued mentally to argue with him.

"The Russian soldier is strongly devoted to religion, and if he is to be emancipated, this feeling should not be weakened or destroyed, but merely directed into a new revolutionary channel. Bible readings with proper explanations should inspire hatred towards the government; all is grist that comes to our mill. Some paragraphs of the catechism give the word of God directly forbidding men to elect kings and obey them. The thing is to show up the clergy, who have twisted everything to serve their own interests and to please the kings. The thing is to make the soldiers see the true will of God, and then they will take up arms for freedom against the Tsar without hesitation. By showing them that religion is not against freedom I shall only be multiplying their strength, not weakening it. Sukhinov and many other of the Slavs think we should do without religion altogether. That may hold true for them, but what about the soldiers?"

At this point the grey-whiskered and at the same time youthful face of Mikhei Shutov suddenly rose before him. He recollected the alacrity with which he would have arrested the General himself, had that been necessary for their cause.

Horror assailed him at the thought that he was perhaps wrong, and that the Slavs held more correct views than he on the soldier's enlightenment. Nevertheless he would not give up his intention of having his political catechism read on the morrow before the troops marched out.

He passed a sleepless night in thoughts such as these. Towards morning it was reported to him that two gendarme officers had been arrested at the town gates. One of them was Nesmeyanov, the gendarme whose sudden appearance with a warrant for the arrest of Muravyov had cast a gloom upon the gay ball at Gebel's. Papers found on his person confirmed his identity and his errand. Muravyov smiled wearily.

The officers of the Chernigov Regiment spent the whole night of December 30th in preparations for marching out. They obtained provisions for the soldiers, checked the arms, cartridges and all the articles of outfit. That evening Muravyov had given orders for all the companies to muster in the square at nine in the morning on December 31st.

Five companies came in full fighting trim. They were headed by Commanders Sukhinov, Kuzmin, Solovyov and Shepilo, all utterly devoted to the cause of the rising and personally to Muravyov. Bestuzhev-Ryumin and retired Colonel Matvei Muravyov were there, too.

Sergei Muravyov, in his study, gave final instructions to Lieutenant Mozalevsky and letters for the Kiev members of the Society.

While the Chernigov Regiment was mustering in the square, a sleigh suddenly appeared with Ippolit Muravyov in a brilliant uniform. He had just been promoted to officer of the Guards. Glad as he was to see his youngest brother, the last in the family, Matvei Muravyov quailed at the thought that he, too, would have to share with them all the dangers of the march, the more than probable defeat and that terrible punishment which would certainly be meted out to the rebels.

Ippolit, however, was completely carried away by youthful ardour.

"This solemn scene of the rebel companies' first muster in the square makes one forget even the failure of

December 14th in St. Petersburg!" he said to Matvei. "Perhaps you Southerners will have better luck than the Northerners. But let me tell you this, Matvei, if my hopes are dashed again I shall not survive this second failure. Upon my honour, I am ready to win or fall on the field of battle together with you!" he said, impulsively wringing the hands of the officers. Lieutenant Kuzmin flushed.

"I swear to sell my life dearly, too! Liberty or death!" he cried.

Ippolit threw himself upon his neck. They warmly embraced and exchanged pistols.

Daniel Keiser, a young clergyman who had taken holy orders and started service in the Chernigov Regiment only three months before, came out into the square. Sergei Muravyov had succeeded in persuading him to read the revolutionary catechism, later condemned by the authorities as "subversive."

At last Sergei Muravyov appeared on horseback before the soldiers and officers. The troops drew up in a line at his command, every face reflecting excitement and joyous expectation.

"The Lord created us all equal," Daniel Keiser began in a voice that shook with terror, "and Christ chose his apostles among the common people, and not among the nobles and royalty. Does that mean, then, that God does not love tsars? It does! They are accursed by him as oppressors of the people. Why are the Russian people and the Russian soldiers unhappy? Because they bend their necks to the tsars!"

Muravyov eagerly watched the faces of the soldiers. They grew blank and an expression of apathetic reverence such as they usually wear at ordinary church ceremonies crept into them. The clergyman's vestments, the lectern, the droning churchly voice failed to convey the new revolutionary gist of the catechism to their minds. Some men grasped the idea, but Muravyov read surprise rather than

sympathy in their faces. "Sukhinov was right," he thought ruefully. "Other words than these are needed, and not in this old form of expression, with which quite other ideas are associated."

Holding in his prancing horse with difficulty, he looked the troops over with a burning glance and began to speak with such ardour that his very first words gripped his audience and brought a look of ecstasy into all faces.

"Boys! I congratulate you upon the start of our victorious march! This little town will now go down into history. Here began the great undertaking that is to free our unhappy country from the tyrants, from injustice and evil! We were only two companies when we marched out from Kovalyovka. Now we are already five. The Chernigov Regiment will raise the whole corps, and multitudes will join us. The liberty that we are now proclaiming will sweep through Russia. The sun of freedom will rise in a blaze of glory and reduce the shameful chains of slavery to ashes. Boys, be true then to this great cause. Victory will be ours!"

A rushing murmur ran through the troops in the square. "We shall fight to the last drop of our blood!" someone shouted.

"Victory or death!" shouted Kuzmin, and the cry was taken up by Ippolit Muravyov and all the young officers.

The troops set out for Motovilovka.

The chief of the guard went up to Sergei Muravyov and asked him what was to be done with the arrested gendarmes.

"Oh, let them go, damn them," Muravyov said off-hand. "We can't very well drag them about with us."

The gendarmes were released. They made straight for Kiev, and were the first to bring tidings of the revolt of the Chernigov Regiment.

During the march Ippolit Muravyov told his brothers about the events in St. Petersburg, about the original

plan which had been spoiled by Yakubovich, and about Kakhovsky's refusal to assassinate the Tsar. Quivering with indignation, he told them about Trubetskoy's defection.

"He's a coward and a traitor," he said.

"No, Ippolit, Trubetskoy does not deserve that shameful name," Sergei Muravyov checked him. "I know him well. On the face of it, his conduct is disgraceful, I admit, but he is not a traitor or a coward. Let us be fair. If he were really a coward he could have run away before the event with the help of the Austrian Ambassador Lebzeltern, who is a relative of his. He could have disappeared altogether, but instead he stood by close at hand, waiting until enough rebels had mustered to enable him to take over command and lead them to the assault. He is only a military commander, not a revolutionary leader. He is greatly to blame, of course, but he is not a scoundrel by any means."

"No matter how many troops had rallied, he would not have led them against the palace all the same," Ippolit said angrily.

"But he never made a secret of the fact that he could not accept a republic," Sergei said quickly. "The fault is not Trubetskoy's but of those who elected him Dictator, knowing his convictions."

"But he should have come out in the square, where all his comrades, the soldiers and a crowd of people, all filled with sympathy for the rebels, had gathered!" Ippolit said obstinately.

"Never mind," Matvei said gently, slipping his arm through his. "To make up for it, *we* have come out! Yes, Ippolit, the North and South are one force, one will. Poor Pestel, how fondly he had dreamt of this! I wonder, does he feel that his dreams are being realized?"

* * *

At two o'clock on December 31st, the Chernigov Regiment under Sergei Muravyov entered Motovilovka, a dingy village with lots of well-sweeps. Two companies which Muravyov had sent on ahead were lined up to greet them—the First Grenadiers' Company commanded by Captain Kozlov and the First Musketeers' Company.

There was not a single member of the Secret Society among those officers. That fact, however, did not deter Sergei Muravyov. He dismounted and went up closer.

"I hope you will not leave your comrades in the lurch," he said.

The soldiers were silent and threw embarrassed glances at Kozlov. Shepilo went up to Muravyov.

"I am sure that Captain Kozlov has turned his soldiers against us," he said quietly. "He is our constant opponent. Arrest him and the soldiers' mood will change at once."

"Enough violence," Muravyov answered him. "In such a cause as ours coercion is degrading." Raising his voice and looking Kozlov squarely in the face, he said:

"I can read your thoughts, men. You can be no comrades of ours. Go back whence you came!"

The grenadiers, headed by Captain Kozlov, promptly went away. The musketeers joined the rebels.

Towards midnight Major Trukhin and the gendarme officers whom Muravyov had had released, came galloping into Kiev on winded horses.

The same night Mozalevsky arrived in Kiev.

All was quiet in the city, as if no one there had heard anything about the rising of the Chernigov Regiment. But scarcely had Mozalevsky called on some of the men at the addresses given him by Muravyov, when a hue and cry was raised all over the town. Mozalevsky sought refuge in Kureniovka, on the outskirts of Kiev, intending

to make his way to Brusilov by the high-road. He was seized as a suspect, however, and brought before Prince Shcherbakov, Commander of the Fourth Corps. Here, to his amazement, he saw Major Trukhin and the gendarme officers who had been on Muravyov's tracks since December 25th and had themselves ended up in the guard-house at Vasilkov. Mozalevsky was taken into custody and escorted to the First Army Headquarters.

Muravyov's weakness in releasing the enemies of the rising had further lamentable consequence—the flight from Trilesy of Captain Lang, who had been locked up in a cellar without a guard. Frozen to the marrow, he appeared at Divisional Headquarters in Belaya Tserkov after his escape and reported "a mutiny in the Chernigov Regiment" to the divisional commander, that same General Tikhanovsky whom Mikhei Shutov had encountered when leading his Musketeers' Company to Motovilovka where Muravyov was stationed.

Tikhanovsky sent a messenger to General Rote in Zhitomir. Dispatches flew farther, from General to General, until the report finally reached the Commander of the First Army in Mogilyov.

Nabokov, stationed in Brusilov with his Kremenchug Regiment, received an order from Rote to bring his regiment at once to Zhitomir. And although he sympathized with the rebels, Nabokov was glad that he would not be obliged either to associate himself with Muravyov or come out against him, since his regiment was under suspicion.

The hopes that Muravyov had placed in Pikhachov's Fifth Horse-Artillery Company in the long run were disappointed, too. At the general meeting of the United Slavs and the Southern Society held in the camp at Leshchin Pikhachov had sworn publicly that he would "never yield to anyone the privilege of the first shot in the fight for his country's freedom."

General Rote sent Pikhachov orders to leave Brusilov and move at once at a quick march to the village of Pavoloch. There Pikhachov was arrested.

Yes, the day of reckoning for the whole chain of errors dawned in Motovilovka.

* * *

Sergei Muravyov called a day's rest in Motovilovka on January 1st. This was a dangerous procedure likely to damp the men's ardour, but Muravyov thought it inadvisable to move on until he knew the results of Mozalevsky's reconnoitring mission in Kiev.

How could he know that Mozalevsky had been arrested before he had had time to do anything? That the Seventeenth Chasseurs' Regiment was being withdrawn from Belaya Tserkov, and that Pikhachov had been arrested too? That the gendarme officers and Trukhin, whom Muravyov had released, had done their work before he could rally his forces? That Lang, who had escaped from the cellar, had not let the grass grow under his feet either?

So far Muravyov knew nothing of this, and tried his best to keep up the spirits of his troops. He spoke to many of the soldiers, took a great interest in their needs and did everything in his power to supply them with warm clothes and food.

While Muravyov was checking the guards, church crowds in their Sunday clothes pressed round him. The people seemed to be aware of the noble intentions and selfless motives by which the rebels were moved. From all sides Muravyov heard stirring words and good wishes: "God bless you, our deliverer!"

A tall elderly peasant of military bearing with a black band over one eye attracted Muravyov's attention. Apparently he had some business with Muravyov, for he

was trying to squeeze his way through the dense crowd that surrounded him, and said something to Sergeant-Major Mikhei Shutov, who was standing next to him.

At last Shutov shouldered his way through to Muravyov.

"Sir," he said in a low voice, "there is a man here who wants to see you on important business." He pointed to the one-eyed peasant. "He tacked on to our company on the road as soon as he found out that we were going to join you in Motovilovka. He says he's been delegated by the peasants of Belaya Tserkov."

"That's interesting," said Muravyov. "Bring him to my billet straight away."

Scarcely had Muravyov crossed the threshold of the house when his orderly announced the arrival of Shutov with a strange man.

"Let them both in."

The one-eyed man saluted and introduced himself: "Osip Karpenko."

"He's a partisan of 1812," Mikhei Shutov added in a tone of respect and tactfully withdrew.

"I've heard about you, Karpenko. From Lieutenant Gorbachevsky," Muravyov said kindly. "You lived at his place, didn't you, after leaving Yakushkin?"

"Yes, sir," the ex-partisan answered. "I left Lieutenant Gorbachevsky, too, and went to live with some relatives near Belaya Tserkov, on one of Countess Branicka's farms. She has farms all over the neighbourhood. Well, sir, our peasants sent me to see you."

Muravyov drew a chair up for the partisan.

"Sit down. Rumours have reached me," he said, "that the steward of one of Branicka's farms has armed the peasants with sticks against our regiment, falsely representing that our Chernigov Regiment has risen in revolt for the sake of pillaging. Is that true?"

"There was something of the sort, but I wasn't dozing either," the partisan said with genial complacency. "I sharpened up people's wits for them. I had told them long ago that you were coming out against slavery and stood for the peasants' rights. They don't believe too much, sir. You can't blame them. They didn't see a precious lot of good from the nobles, and as for their landlady, she's a wild beast! Still, some of the peasants understand a thing or two, and it was with these I came to an arrangement to rise against the Countess. She's made life hell for them. 'We'd do anything to get even with her,' they say. They're a tremendous force, the peasants, once they get going."

Muravyov stopped in front of the partisan, and looking straight into his single eye, which sparkled with intelligence, he asked:

"Are you sure, Osip, that if they rise they will not start by burning the manor?"

"That's certainly the first thing they'll do," Osip said with satisfaction. "And they won't think twice about it. They must have some outlet for all their grievances. And once they join up with the troops they'll see you through. The muzhik's a clever fellow, you know. He'll be a great help to your cause, sir."

"Our cause is not plundering," Muravyov answered drily. His face had clouded. "A force that is likely to take the form of simple vengeance against the nobility instead of standing up for the ideas of liberty and equality for which we have risen is a poor help. We shall have more trouble trying to keep it within bounds than fighting the Tsar's troops."

"I'm afraid there won't be much fighting to do," Osip said sadly. "You have just about a thousand bayonets, while the Tsar has divisions and corps. It's only a question of a day or two before you're crushed! But if you gave the muzhik his freedom the whole countryside would

rise and follow you. And if you joined forces with the military colonies, it would be like a spark to a barrel of gunpowder! Take it from me, sir, without the muzhiks you don't stand a chance!"

From outside the window came sounds of music and cheers. Kuzmin ran in, radiant with joy, and reported to Muravyov: "Bistritsky has come to join us with Company Two."

Muravyov and the partisan hastened out and were swept along by the stream of people going out to meet the soldiers. It was a sunny day with a blue sky and crisp cold air. On this exhilarating day Company Two, headed by an extremely young-looking sub-lieutenant, flushed with the quick march, looked festive and gay as it entered the village from the other end. Slightly in the rear marched non-commissioned officer Klim Avramov.

Baron Solovyov, the company's commander, whom Trukhin had had removed for "mutinous conduct," ran forward beside himself with joy, and embraced the non-commissioned officer and the soldiers. He had had misgivings as to whether Bistritsky, who was not even a member of the Society, would bring the company down. Such painful experiences of betrayal by old conspirators like Artamon Muravyov with his Akhtirka Regiment and the defection of Trubetskoy and Yakubovich in the North, had given rise to doubts and suspicion.

Sergei Muravyov ordered the company to be given a good meal, and retired to his lodgings with Bistritsky, non-commissioned officer Avramov and Osip Karpenko.

Bistritsky related how, before taking any decision, he had questioned every man in the company whether he was prepared to join the rebels. "I had a talk with him, too, our favourite N.C.O.," he said, wringing Avramov's hand.

"Do you remember me asking you, Klim, whether we could take our chance with it?"

"I told him that we not only could, but should," Avramov said cheerily, looking at Muravyov. "It would be a shame, I said, to lag behind our comrades in such an affair."

"How do you know what the aim of our rising is? Who told you?" Muravyov asked. Avramov glanced at him reproachfully.

"Why, the members of the Slav League, of course. The whole company knows what it has risen for. I answer for our men with my life."

Muravyov embraced Avramov without saying a word, then turned to the partisan.

"There, this is what I call help," he said. "They have all come out in perfect marching order. And we shall all go to fight for the people's good and rights. We want to avoid bloodshed if we can. But we have no time to spare sorting out our own ideas and those of the protesting mass in order to direct this protest into useful channels. If we were to join forces with your peasants, as you suggest, what would be the result but atrocities and disorganization of our ranks?"

The partisan shook his head.

"Ah, sir," he said with reproach, "I'm telling you again, our muzhik knows his onions all right. I tell you what, if you like I'll get the muzhiks together from one or two farms and form a military unit out of them, the way I used to do in 1812, and bring them down to you. They'll be the same soldiers, only in homespun coats and bast shoes."

"Very well. But it is not enough to bring them down in military order. The thing is to keep them in it," Muravyov said with a smile.

The partisan stood up and warmly shook the hand which Muravyov proffered him.

"And have muskets ready for us, sir, instead of sticks. We shall meet, then, in Belaya Tserkov."

Bistritsky and Avramov shook hands with Karpenko, too, and echoed in one voice:

"In Belaya Tserkov!"

* * *

In the continued absence of news from Mozalevsky, Muravyov hesitated to march on Kiev. Everything depended upon their first encounter with the enemy and the consequences of that encounter. Knowing this, Muravyov decided to lead his soldiers first to Belaya Tserkov, where he hoped to find the Seventeenth Chasseurs' Regiment with whose help he would be able to break through and join the Slavs.

At nine in the morning of January 2nd the Chernigov Regiment started out from Motovilovka.

The rebels no longer had that jubilant cheerful air with which they had made their entry into Vasilkov. Their hopes that other regiments and divisions would join them were now shattered, and all realized that the enemy's strength was immeasurably superior to theirs. What further tended to lower their fighting spirits was that they were obliged to select their route of march with humiliating precautions calculated to avoid an encounter with the enemy's artillery. The rebels themselves had no artillery at all.

Nevertheless, Sergei Muravyov rode gallantly at the head of his companies, sitting his saddle with ease, and turning to his soldiers a face wearing a kind encouraging smile. Inwardly he was assailed by a gnawing anxiety, tormented by thoughts of all the mistakes he had made and the opportunities he had missed. "If the Chernigov Regiment had moved on Zhitomir at once and arrested the staff at Corps Headquarters before General Rote had heard of the rising, the government troops would have been paralyzed for a time. And what is most important,

the successful outcome of the first attack would have strengthened the men's spirits and buoyed up those who wavered, while sudden junction with the Slavs in Zhitomir would have turned that town into a stronghold of the rebellion."

Muravyov as yet knew nothing of another blow that was in store for him. The Seventeenth Chasseurs' Regiment, which he had expected to find in Belaya Tserkov, was no longer there, and Sub-Lieutenant Vladkovsky, their liaison officer, had been arrested.

At four o'clock on January 2nd Sergei Muravyov occupied the village of Pologi. A little later, when it had grown quite dark, Sukhinov went out to Belaya Tserkov with a small mounted squad of the most reliable soldiers to reconnoitre.

About a mile short of Branicka's manor it ran into a posse of Cossacks, which that landlady had induced the Governor to give her for the protection of her estate (it was already rumoured in the neighbourhood that Muravyov and his companies were out pillaging).

Sukhinov resorted to a stratagem. Having only a few men against a squadron of well-armed Cossacks, Sukhinov and his men hid themselves in the thicket, and when the Cossacks came up close, he suddenly sprang to his feet, pulled out his sword and rushed forward, crying: "Follow me, boys!"

The Cossacks scattered, but Sukhinov succeeded in taking one of them prisoner. The latter was brought before Sergei Muravyov.

"What is the idea fighting your own people?" Muravyov said. "You're an ignorant man!"

He told the non-commissioned officers to explain to the Cossack the aim of the rising and get whatever information they could from him. The Cossack, treated to a good meal and a still better drink, told all he knew. Among other things, he related that the peasants, bound with

ropes, had been locked up in the landlady's barn after a fight with the Cossacks. Their leader was a one-eyed man by the name of Osip. The patrol had seen him creeping through the back gardens after his return from Motovilovka. The steward ordered the Cossacks to seize him. And although Osip had fought like a devil, stabbing two of the Cossacks, he was shot down during the scuffle.

"Why, that is our partisan Osip Karpenko!" Mikhei Shutov guessed at once. "And those peasants must have been the men he wanted to bring down here in military order."

The information gleaned from the Cossack was reported to Muravyov.

He tried to suppress his anxiety and forced himself to believe in that last hope—the Slavs.

* * *

The news concerning the events of December 14th did not reach Novograd-Volynsky until the twenty-sixth. While waiting for Sergei Muravyov to join them Gorbachevsky and Borisov decided to prepare for him an armed nucleus of soldiers who could be relied upon in all emergencies.

Enlistment was started with the Eighth Brigade in which Borisov and Gorbachevsky served, and the other units responded to their appeal. Contact with the volunteers who agreed to take part in the rising was maintained by Pyotr Borisov's eldest brother Andrei, a retired lieutenant.

This time not only the gunners but the rank and file were initiated, and told about the necessity of the revolution and its immediate aims—emancipation for the serfs and reduction of the term of military service for the soldiers.

Four days passed in talks, roll-calls and preparations.

Still there was no sign of Muravyov. This began to cause anxiety.

The news that a pursuit party had gone to Trilesty after Muravyov made the Slavs change their plans. They decided to muster their forces and act independently.

Had the Slavs only known how desperate Muravyov felt in Motovilovka and how badly he needed assistance at that moment they would have rushed to his aid without a moment's delay.

The long distance, however, made it impossible to keep in close touch. Left to their own resources, the Slavs, wishing to act with the greatest possible discretion, threw all their forces over to Staro-Konstantinov instead of Motovilovka. They decided to march out to that little town on the night of January 2nd in order to make junction with the Penza and Saratov Regiments.

They had good grounds for such a decision. Pyotr Borisov had received a note from his brother Andrei in the neighbourhood of Zhitomir, saying: "Almost the whole Penza Regiment will side with us. I was there when they sent for cartridges."

News was also received that the Saratov Regiment was awaiting the signal for the rising with impatience, and that five company commanders in the Tambov Regiment had been enrolled into the Society.

Officers who were not members of the Society offered their services to Pyotr Borisov, too. One lieutenant said ruefully: "I am sorry that I have not earned your trust. I am not a member of your Society, but I assure you that I will bring my company out at your first call."

* * *

The government troops, meanwhile, were not wasting their time. Acting on information that Muravyov was on his way to Brusilov, General Rote promptly marched out

at dawn with six Hussar squadrons "to nip the mutiny in the bud."

He did not bother his head about the causes that lay behind this "Russian riot," and chiefly resented "the perfidy and hypocrisy of Muravyov," whom he had so recently entertained with dinner, champagne and details of the events of December 14th.

"Without giving any opinion of that deplorable incident, I simply hazarded a suggestion as a Frenchman and a strategist as to what chances the rebels had of winning the day, and that fellow Muravyov sat there listening to me with his tongue in his cheek!" exclaimed Rote. "My candour did not move him in the least!"

Apart from his personal grievance against Muravyov, Rote wanted to distinguish himself by being the first to catch the criminals and thus put an end to the rumours current at Headquarters alleging him to have shut his eyes at the doings of the mutineers.

* * *

At four o'clock in the morning, while it was yet quite dark, Muravyov led the companies out of the village of Pologi. Eleven o'clock found them approaching a village that looked oddly familiar. When Muravyov saw the old church with the tall narrow bell-tower, and the little houses with their brightly painted shutters, his heart sank. "My God, why, this is Kovalyovka!" it dawned on him. "The very place from which the rebel companies had started out six days ago. And now we are back from where we had started."

The soldiers around him laughed and grumbled at the same time. "Going round in circles like sheep!" they said.

Even then Muravyov's courage did not fail him.

At noon he resumed the march. He chose a short cut through the steppe and again miscalculated. If his com-

panies had gone by way of the wooded hills the government troops would have had much greater difficulty in dealing with them. Now, moving in the open, Muravyov's companies were walking straight into the mouths of the enemy's cannon.

But Sergei Muravyov rode at the head of the column, calm and proud in the knowledge that he embodied the hopes, the faith and revolutionary spirit of Pestel and Rileyev, the selfless devotion of the noblest members of the Secret Society and of these soldier heroes, who were sticking to him through thick and thin.

"There, in St. Petersburg," he thought, "a handful of men faced the Tsar's troops and grapeshot, and here we have come out. Whatever the future may have in store for us, the breath of freedom has swept over Russia like a whirlwind thanks to the North and the South."

Turning to Sergeant-Major Mikhei Shutov, he said:

"Remember this, Mikhei—the first challenge to the autocratic power has been made!"

* * *

Meanwhile the government troops, their guns loaded with grapeshot, were coming up from three sides.

When the first shots were fired, Muravyov and his men still clung to the belief that these soldiers were their allies and brethren, who, upon coming face to face with them, would show a single front and turn the muzzles of their guns against the common enemy.

Heissmar's troops came up quite close. The grapeshot burst with a snarl. Momentarily stunned with bitter disappointment, Muravyov quickly recovered, formed his troops square, and made straight for the cannon. Solov-yov, too, set the soldiers an example of bravery that defied death; he stood manfully under the hail of grape-

shot and urged the men on. But it was all in vain. Throwing down their arms the soldiers fled in all directions.

And still Muravyov refused to acknowledge defeat.

Not even when the soldiers began to drop around him, struck down by grapeshot, and one of them shouted to him furiously: "We have been fooled!" did Muravyov realize that the end had come. And when he dropped himself, wounded in the head by a splinter and blinded by his own blood, his reeling brain still failed to grasp whether this was a general defeat, or whether he alone was wounded and his companies had gained the day.

Full realization came only with returning consciousness, when Muravyov found himself lying on a litter of straw in the large low room of the inn at Trilesy, whither the prisoners and the wounded had been brought by the hussars upon Heissmar's orders.

Next to him he saw Matvei Muravyov, and in the corner, pale as a ghost, Lieutenant Kuzmin. Sergei Muravyov wanted to ask where his youngest brother Ippolit was, he felt an urge to shout out that they should not give way to despair, that it was their last duty now to prove to their enemies that they had not acted thoughtlessly, and if they had not won victory themselves, at least they had set an example for others to follow.

But he could not utter a single audible word. A terrible pain in the head bound his tongue and benumbed his brain. The sound of a shot, like a crash of thunder, plunged him into oblivion again. Kuzmin, unable to bear the defeat, had blown his brains out with a pistol which he had succeeded in hiding upon his person.

Ippolit Muravyov, his new guardsman's uniform still spick and span, lay dead in the barn within a few paces of the inn. He had killed himself the moment he realized that the government troops had won the day.

Side by side with Ippolit in the same barn lay Lieutenant Shepilo, cut down by Heissmar himself. Even in death

Shepilo's face bore the stamp of heroism. His fingers still clutched the sword-hilt, and the hussars had been unable to unclench them.

Kuzmin, Ippolit Muravyov and Shepilo were buried in a common grave.

At nine the next morning the prisoners were sent off to Belaya Tserkov.

On the way the hussars of Heissmar's detachment learned the real reason for the revolt of the Chernigov Regiment and immediately changed their attitude towards the rebels. They were very sorry they had not known the truth before, and had believed the false report alleging Muravyov to have raised a mutiny for the sake of pillage.

Sergei Muravyov and Bestuzhev-Ryumin were kept in custody separately. Matvei Muravyov and the other officers were kept together. The rank and file were confined in the peasant huts. All were put in irons.

On the night of January 11th Muravyov and the other officers were escorted to the town of Mogilyov.

The bitter memory of his numerous errors preyed on Sergei Muravyov's mind and deprived him of sleep. His wound, too, gave him great pain. In an agony of body and soul, he asked himself a hundred times why he had spared the life of Gebel, that despicable commander of the Chernigov Regiment who had so haply fallen into his hands at Trilesy on December 25th together with the gendarmes. He had released his direst enemies, and they had lost no time in dealing a fatal blow to the revolutionary cause. What unpardonable lenience, what sentimentality! And that drunkard Trukhin, Lang and the others? How easy it would have been to put them out of the way!

One piece of news, however, that trickled through to Muravyov, was like balsam to his soul. Young Bistritsky had remained true to his noble self to the end. That much

Muravyov had learned from his comrades through the guards.

Bistritsky had been brought to Mogilyov, too. General Toll, the Chief of Staff, who was investigating the conduct of that officer in bringing his company to Motovilovka to join the rebels, had said to him:

"You could have acted otherwise. Instead of bringing the soldiers where they had no business to be, you could, on the contrary, have kept them within bounds. Then, instead of the probable convict's sentence that is awaiting you, you would have earned a great reward."

"Your Excellency," Bistritsky had answered, "I may be capable of folly, but of meanness, never!"

Thus answered the young officer with the blooming cheeks of a girl.

When he heard of Bistritsky's behaviour, Muravyov smiled for the first time in those painful days. "Good seeds, when dropped into the earth, do not perish. Those we have sown will yield a great harvest in their proper season," he thought with pride.

CHAPTER NINE

Ten days after his arrest, while still in Tulchin, Pestel gathered from the thirty-nine questions put to him that the government knew little about the Secret Society, and he answered:

"I belong to no secret society, I know of no members, and consequently I can say nothing about their designs, actions, or motives."

On the third of January Pestel was brought to St. Petersburg. Nicholas wrote a note in his own hand to General Sukin, Commandant of the Peter and Paul Fortress, ordering Pestel to be confined in the Alexeyevsky Ravelin, the famous prison of which it was said that no

man ever came out of it, but was carried out. Escape from the ravelin was impossible: a deep moat with a drawbridge and a high stone wall were reliable safeguards. The place was strongly guarded; vigilant, ruthless guards were posted at every step.

The first few weeks in the ravelin were the hardest to bear. They brought home to Pestel the full force of his impotence in face of the government machine, and plunged him, still living, into the cold and silence of the grave.

But little by little, like the vital forces of Nature which come out of their frozen sleep when winter is gone, so does the human being, benumbed by disaster, gradually revive, as it were, and feel the strength and courage come coursing back into his body. So it is with men of stout heart; so it was with Pestel.

When the door of his cell suddenly opened, and the noseless Commandant's assistant Podushkin appeared with two warders to lead him blindfolded to the Committee of Inquiry to be interrogated, Pestel had a feeling as though he had to relive his own life, probe deeper into its meaning and draw the necessary conclusions before entering upon some unknown new life that awaited him. His life was so closely interwoven with all the phases of the Secret Society's development that to think of them was to think of himself.

While giving evidence, Pestel recalled the past so vividly that he seemed to be reliving it anew. His thoughts carried him back to 1817, the beginning of the year; he had laid the first brick of the Society by writing the "Charter of the True and Loyal Sons of the Fatherland." But barely had he left for Mitau with Count Witgenstein on official business, when the members of the Society, who secretly disagreed with him, cut up and altered his revolutionary charter. His three trips to St. Petersburg undertaken with a view to uniting the scat-

tered forces of the Secret Society were now being used as a serious charge against him. That meeting, at which, by the request of the members of the Society, he had been obliged to make a report concerning the essential differences between the monarchistic and republican forms of government, the Committee of Inquiry now called "the notorious meeting at Glinka's" where, it appears, Pestel by nothing short of magic had turned the whole assembly into republicans against their will!

During the interrogations Pestel learned of the evidence given by a number of people, and he realized with chagrin that some had lost their heads. It was with profound respect that he recalled Vladimir Raevsky, that strong, proud man who, for his connection with the Secret Society, had been languishing in the Tiraspol Fortress for five years and not betrayed a single comrade. And what fervid feelings the man had, what a fine understanding. Pushkin himself envied his verse:

*The stone-dumb people, slumb'ring stay
Beneath their formidable yoke—
The flogging dynasty that slay
All thought, all protest in the folk.*

"Where is he now?" Pestel wondered. He was the first person Pestel had dreamt of releasing in the event of success.

Pestel knew that his closest friends—Yushnevsky, Baryatinsky and Volkonsky—had been arrested, too, and were confined in the same fortress. But where was Lorer? Had he revealed the hiding place of the *Russkaya Pravda*? Lorer's open countenance with its gay twinkling eyes rose before him. No, he would never betray.

Lorer was brought to St. Petersburg by General Chernishov on January 4th. It was daybreak, and lights were burning in the windows. As if on purpose the carriage drove past the house of Lorer's uncle, Prince Tsitsianov,

where young Lorer had spent many a gay night. The familiar entrance, at which he was now powerless to stop the carriage, and the fact that Chernishov would not allow him the use of a razor to shave himself before appearing at the palace, were his first poignant sensations of lost liberty.

When Lorer was brought to the guard-house at the Winter Palace, he immediately created an uproar. How many times he had dozed here himself, sprawling in the arm-chair, like the duty officer who was now receiving him as a prisoner!

When the state messenger came running in with a frightened look, yelling: "His Majesty wants to see the prisoner!" and the escort lined up around Lorer with drawn swords, he flared up and said in a tone of command:

"Not a step with the escort! I am still a Major and am wearing uniform. Shame on you, making a police station out of the palace!"

This peremptory shout, albeit on the part of a person who was at the moment deprived of all rights, worked like magic. Lorer was admitted without an escort to the presence of General Levashov in the Hermitage Room, which was brilliantly lit up.

Levashov immediately notified Lorer that the Tsar was displeased with his stubborn silence, and pointed respectfully to a door at the end of the room from which the angry Tsar had just emerged. Nicholas was wearing the Izmailovsky uniform, buttoned up to the neck, and he stared before him with fishy lifeless eyes.

"Do you know what fate awaits you?" he shouted, and without waiting for an answer, he made an eloquent gesture round his neck, and added: "Death!"

Nevertheless Lorer gave no evidence whatever. The state messenger was summoned and given a packet with a black seal, and Lorer was rushed off to the fortress.

Under the gate arch the prisoner was greeted by a hollow echo; it sounded to him like the mingled sighs of all the victims who had been brought there before him. In the cell, after the heavy door, with a creak of its rusty hinges, had slammed to, Lorer took in his surroundings—a wretched cot, a little table screwed to the wall, and the loathsome chamber-pot. A shabby dressing-gown and huge slippers in which to shuffle round the cell—seven feet by seven—lay upon the cot. The tiny window high up near the ceiling was smeared with whitewash, and the sunshine barely filtered through even at midday.

One night the Commandant's assistant Podushkin came into the cell with a warder carrying prison uniform for Lorer. The prisoner, carefully blindfolded, was led out into the courtyard. He walked like a blind man, gulping the fresh air. In the brightly lit room of the fortress Commandant's apartment the bandage was taken off his eyes.

This sudden change from the gloomy cell to the solemn grandeur of the tribunal consisting of twenty bemedalled generals was considered by the authorities an effective psychological means of cowing prisoners. Lorer, however, was not in the least intimidated. When he was sternly asked: "Where is Colonel Pestel's *Russkaya Pravda*?" he repeated proudly: "Honour and my oath given to a comrade do not permit me to reveal that."

The infuriated generals threw dignity to the winds and shouted at him in chorus:

"Chain him hand and foot! Put him in irons!"

Lorer was taken away.

Only at the last interrogation, when the exasperated Chernishov showed Lorer a document undoubtedly written in Pestel's own hand, stating that he had given the *Russkaya Pravda* to Lieutenant Kryukov and Captain Cherkasov in Major Lorer's presence for the purpose of

having it concealed, did Lorer confirm the fact and put his name to it.

Another man thrown into the Alexeyevsky Ravelin for his refusal to reveal the whereabouts of the *Russkaya Pravda*—that was the only serious offence he was guilty of—was Nikolai Basargin, aide-de-camp to Kiselyov.

Like Lorer, he was led blindfolded from his dark cell into the brilliantly lighted hall filled with bemedalled generals. Basargin remembered the order in which they sat.

In the centre Tatishchev sat enthroned in the president's chair, with Golitsin, Count Dibich, the Chief of Staff, Chernishov and Benkendorf on his left, and Levashov, Potapov, Adlerberg and others on his right. Dmitri Bludov, a once witty member of the "Arzamas" and pretty well known for his free-thinking, acted as secretary. Leaning on the back of his chair stood the Grand Duke Michael, staring absently at the chandelier. General Pavel Kutuzov sat dozing in a deep arm-chair next to a marble column.

Chernishov, who was in a particularly bad humour, pounced on Basargin.

"What do you know about the *Russkaya Pravda*? Out with the truth!"

"I know nothing."

"We shall make you speak. You will be put in irons!"

Chernishov's shout awakened General Kutuzov, who had already begun to snore. He mumbled sleepily: "That's it, put him in irons...."

"Your Excellency," Basargin said with suppressed indignation, "you were so fatigued that you fell asleep. Consequently, you could not have been aware what General Chernishov asked me, yet you share his anger. Is that fair?"

The Grand Duke Michael who, next to his love of military parade, best appreciated a humorous situation, chuckled.

"You can't put everyone in irons," General Dibich said gruffly to Chernishov. "The more so that Lieutenant Basargin, perhaps, is speaking the truth."

"The written questions will be sent to you," Chernishov, somewhat disconcerted, shouted to Basargin. "You will answer in writing!"

* * *

His *Russkaya Pravda* occupied all Pestel's thoughts in the long dreary hours of his solitary confinement. Finally he decided that since there would be no one to look after it—the members of the Society would have been driven off to Siberia, while those still at large would be hounded and terrified—it were, perhaps, safer in the basements of the state archives than buried somewhere in the ground. In the state archives the *Russkaya Pravda* had more chances of living to see happier days. Guided by these motives, Pestel gave evidence accordingly.

Now, during the interrogations, Pestel experienced at times an inner exultation verging on ecstasy. This happened whenever he had occasion to dilate on his scheme of state organization, which was permeated by such a genuine spirit of democracy as defied the imagination of the authorities, whom duty compelled to listen to speeches that struck them as shocking and fantastic.

"Tell the Committee of Inquiry frankly what you really aimed at in your free-thinking schemes?" General Levashov said in a stony voice. This commander of the Hussars of the Life-Guards, and keen lover of horse-flesh, was an old acquaintance of Pestel's.

And Pestel told them. The halls of the Hermitage, behung with pictures by Salvator Rosa and Domenichino, resounded to solemn words never heard there before.

"I wanted full equality for all citizens. I wanted the greatest possible welfare for all and every one. That was the basic idea of my *Russkaya Pravda*!"

These speeches were invariably accompanied by such accentuated official civilities that they began to savour of mockery: "If the worthy Committee will be pleased to note.... If the honourable Committee will favour me with its attention...."

And after such courteous preliminaries, he would say things that startled his judges by their implacable logic.

"Any and all regulations that violate the equality of all before the law are an intolerable abuse of power. All tyrannous authority must be abolished, for it leads to cruel injustice against the greater part of the nation."

Pestel's fiercest attacks were directed against serfdom. In speaking he would look straight into the dull, expressionless faces of the officers of the Tsar, who were administering justice and meting out punishment to him, men who themselves owned thousands of slaves. He levelled charges and passed sentence, as if they were the malefactors and he their grim judge.

"Slavery is shameful, inhuman, it goes against all laws, against the very religion which the serf-owners profess."

And calmly propounding a natural and rational truth, he stated his famous thesis concerning the land:

"The land belongs to the whole human race and not to private persons, and therefore it cannot be owned exclusively by any individuals."

Inwardly shocked, but outwardly preserving their usual gravity of mien, the members of the Committee of Inquiry listened with seeming impassivity to the speeches expounding the new conditions of existence for the Russian state. These conditions could only be changed by a military revolution that would vest the power in a Provisional Government for the purpose of carrying out the necessary reforms. And the mandate for that government, its charter and instructor, was to be the *Russkaya Pravda*.

Pestel felt a resurgence of strength, as if he had grown younger. He was passing his examination before his country splendidly.

Yes, his plan was right, and it remained but to put it into effect, Pestel thought. Naturally, one could not expect a single word of his to carry conviction to the minds of these men.

His eyes travelled over the Committee members and came to rest on the well-favoured countenance of Adlerberg, a former schoolmate of his at the Corps of Pages. Adlerberg had been at the top of the school until Pestel, who entered the last course, pushed him down to second place. Now Adlerberg was his judge. He attended the proceedings and interrogations of the state criminals not as a member of the Committee, but as the close personal friend of Nicholas. He anticipated all official reports by telling the Tsar all he had heard, seen and suspected. He described the behaviour of each prisoner under cross-examination: whether he had been nervous or audacious, repentant or obdurate.

The judges and authorities were unanimous in the opinion which they had formed of Pestel. It grew clearer at every interrogation that Pestel was an implacable enemy of the autocracy. His steadfast convictions and the ascendancy of a powerful mind set him apart from the rest of the accused. For this reason alone if for no other Pestel was singled out for the death penalty. Indeed, what clemency could he expect after all he had said before the Committee of Inquiry? Had he not admitted that the reason why he had insisted upon a republic instead of a constitutional monarchy was because he had had before him the recent instances of treacherous restoration of absolutism in Spain and Portugal? Furthermore, his ideas, developed to their logical conclusion, implied the inevitability of regicide, nay more, the extermination of the whole royal family.

The priest Mislovsky, who officiated as a spiritual intermediary between the criminals and the authorities, left the following curious record of his impression of Pestel's personality.

"Pestel stands conspicuously apart among the generality of conspirators, both by virtue of his education and his strength of mind. He is extremely quick-witted, resolute, eloquent. A profound mathematician, an excellent military tactician. None of the accused men has been put through so many interrogations at the Committee, none has faced the ordeal of so many confrontations. He is ever and always true to himself. Nothing could shake his pride, and it seemed as if he were ready even to take the weight of two Alpine mountains upon his shoulders. He always answers the Committee's questions with visible pride and arrogance, as it were."

* * *

One day, during cross-examination, Pestel started involuntarily when the judges set before him the deposition of Alexander Poggio, which formed the basis of the whole accusatory edifice. Poggio, a member of the Southern Society and a brave man, so utterly devoted to Pestel that he had not shrunk from attempting to organize his escape from the Bernardine Monastery, had suddenly, for no obvious reason, told the Committee of a confidential conversation that had taken place between them. "Did they torture him, I wonder?" the thought flashed through Pestel's mind.

"You cold-bloodedly ticked off on your fingers the names of the royal family who were to be assassinated. Upon reaching the number thirteen, you hesitated on seeing how horrified Poggio was, then continued the count with malicious glee."

General Levashov, usually impassive, spoke with the

indignation of an outraged loyal subject, and his jowls quivered. A member of the Committee sitting beside him shrilly reiterated the refrain of the moralizing tale:

“Make an open-hearted confession!”

Sadly perplexed, Pestel admitted:

“Yes, that is what I told Poggio when he called on me in September 1824, but I used no theatrical gestures. They are foreign to my nature. And I was guided not by cruelty or malice, but by the necessity of prosecuting what I had started to its conclusion with as little sacrifice of people’s lives as was possible. Personally, I hated no one. But I love my country and wanted to serve her to my last dying breath. I beg to inform you that I acted only for my country’s good. I saw that the welfare or adversity of nations depends entirely upon the existing government. This knowledge stimulated my interest in the sciences dealing with such subjects and pointing out the correct path towards my aim.”

At the interrogations Pestel spoke at great length of his own plans and actions, but was uncommunicative where others were concerned. In reply to an artful question of the Committee as to whether certain “high-placed personages” (Mordvinov, Speransky and others) belonged to the Secret Society, he emphatically denied any connection with them.

Nicholas had information that the members of the Secret Society had nominated Speransky and Mordvinov for the Provisional Government. Furthermore it had been reported to the Tsar that when this plan of the conspirators was hinted at, Speransky was alleged to have smiled enigmatically, saying: “Such conjectures may be made only *after* the positive success of the undertaking.”

The Tsar planned to use Speransky for building up “a special case” against Pestel.

* * *

In their time Speransky's attempts to introduce a number of constitutional reforms had met with fierce opposition on the part of the old nobility. Karamzin had delivered himself of the following aphorism in regard to Speransky: "A Minister is only the hand of the crowned head, and a hand is less than the head." Another sarcastic remark of his anent Speransky's objectionable innovations was: "He is sewing us a coat to someone else's measure; the new form of his laws is foreign to Russians."

Speransky's efforts during that period of his career received a hostile reception. The court aristocracy clamoured against what they called his attempts "to bring the future into the present." They failed to see that Speransky's reforms were merely a policy of petty concessions and ameliorations aimed at preserving the privileges of that very same aristocracy and staving off the revolution. Speransky himself, in his memorandum concerning the contemplated reforms, wrote that, "By 1811 Russia will have adopted a new mode of life and will be completely transformed."

But it fell out otherwise.

Hatred of Speransky among the nobles, who regarded him as an upstart, knew no bounds, but the ranks of his enemies were swelled by two ukases aimed against the idleness and illiteracy of the government officials, whom he compelled, regardless of age, to pass their examinations anew.

All sarcastic remarks about the Tsar, alleged to have been uttered by Speransky, were reported to the suspicious Alexander. The latter's vanity was so deeply wounded that he made no special effort to defend his ungrateful Secretary of State against the charges of treason and secret intercourse with Napoleon that his enemies levelled at him.

Defamed as a traitor, Speransky was dismissed. The

once all-powerful Secretary of State was banished first to Nizhni-Novgorod, then to Perm.

Even during those glorious days when Napoleon was driven out of Russia and the country celebrated victory, the disgraced statesman was refused permission to return to St. Petersburg to join his only and dearly beloved daughter. What is more, he was suddenly appointed Governor-General of Siberia, where two years spent under the most difficult conditions, combatting usury and corruption among the government officials, impaired his health completely.

Alexander had never really believed in Speransky's guilt, and was even known to have admitted his own weakness by saying: "But how could I oppose the forces that made me break with him?"

To return to the capital, Speransky had no alternative but to go cap in hand to Arakcheyev, who held the reins of government in his hands. He did so, and was allowed to return. His former intimacy with Alexander, however, was never resumed.

And now Speransky was needed once more. The new Tsar needed his supple mind and vast experience in matters of state in order to invest an unjust and unlawful case with some semblance of legality. When Nicholas learned that Speransky's name stood foremost as a candidate for the Provisional Government planned by the conspirators, he waived all ceremony with him.

The Tsar summoned him and gave him plainly to understand that the time had come for him to prove his devotion to the Sovereign in an important affair of state, and that the royal will in connection with the Decembrists' mutiny required that the defendants' guilt should be established beyond a shadow of doubt, with capital punishment as the only possible verdict.

Speransky understood what the Tsar wanted and agreed to handle the case. Too painful were the memo-

ries of the royal disfavour, his health was broken down, and separation from his daughter again would be more than he could bear. Besides, he so obviously figured in the conspirators' plans that his refusal would have immediately placed him in the position of prosecuted instead of prosecutor.

Speransky's work on the Committee of Inquiry caused him intense suffering, all the more that he knew many of the conspirators personally and had been an old friend of their families.

During those harassing months of incessant mental anguish Speransky became the shadow of himself, and his daughter often heard him sobbing in his bedroom at night. But daytime found him once more the obedient and loyal official, trying to arraign Pestel on a serious charge that would enable the death sentence to be applied to him. This was legally no simple task, since Pestel had not been seized with arms in hand, as the others, and had not been out in the square, but already on December 13th had been arrested in Tulchin without offering any resistance.

The Committee of Inquiry, however, proceeded with its task unflaggingly, and the necessary charges for establishing Pestel's special guilt gradually accumulated.

Speransky resorted to the simple expedient of classifying the accused by categories according to the extent of their guilt. The special "category" committee elected for that purpose with Speransky presiding began to work up the evidence for the purpose of determining the gravity of each man's offence. With the proceedings entering the customary technical phase, Speransky felt easier in his mind.

* * *

On February 23, 1826, Pestel's father left his home in the Smolensk Gubernia to visit his son. It took some

time before permission was granted him. He learned certain details of his son from Pastor Reinboth, who, as a clergyman, had free access to the prison cells. Wishing to comfort his wife and daughter in their great sorrow, he wrote home: "Pavel is in Room 13 of the Alexeyevsky Ravelin. Unlike the others, his room is large and has plenty of light, although the window is barred. The air in it is fresh. Pavel was wearing a silk summer dressing-gown; by the wall stood a bed with tidy and decent bed-clothes, a table, some chairs. On the bed lay another dressing-gown, a quilted one. He was shaved and looked well. Pastor Reinboth noticed no change in his appearance."

The pastor, who was an old friend of Pestel's father, helped the prisoner to piece together the course of events in which he had been no participant and of which he could have heard very little owing to his early arrest. Pestel could now picture to himself both the events of December 14th and the rising of the Chernigov Regiment.

* * *

Pestel was confronted with many of his comrades during the proceedings, and noted with sorrow the changes that solitary confinement had wrought in them.

He was to have a meeting with Sergei Muravyov, too.

This man, taken "with arms in hand," who had brazenly offered resistance to the government troops and thus signed his own death sentence, had preserved even in prison all his noble dignity. Try as the Committee would to extract from him evidence against Pestel, he would invariably answer briefly and simply:

"I had as much influence on the other members of the Society as he did."

Pestel's meeting with Muravyov-Apostol within the prison walls gave him a shock. Muravyov stood before

him thin and very pale, his head still swathed in bandages, but his eyes had in them the old honest and fearless look.

Taking advantage of a pause in the proceedings during which Levashov was explaining some point to one of the Generals, Pestel whispered to Muravyov:

"We shall share our common fate like brothers, dear friend!"

A smile lit up Muravyov's face and he nodded his bandaged head slightly.

* * *

Basargin was placed in such a damp cell that he soon fell ill. The Committee of Inquiry, fearing lest any of the accused should defeat justice by dying before the trial, ordered him to be transferred to a drier cell. Here he had Bestuzhev-Ryumin for his neighbour, and became an involuntary witness of his last few weeks of life.

Bestuzhev was kept in irons and not allowed to shave his beard. He had grown so hairy that no one would have given him his age, which was only twenty-three. Passing down the corridor with a clank of his chains, he presented a ghastly spectacle. He was interrogated very often and faced the ordeal of painful confrontations. He produced on Basargin the impression of a gentle, kind and even simple-minded youth. In the spring, when the inquiry was drawing to its close, sentence of death already hung over Bestuzhev. He was allowed to take a walk in the tiny garden, like the rest, and one day was told that he could have a shave. He was mildly surprised at this sudden attention shown him. The thought of the death sentence never occurred to him owing to the false lulling speeches of the priest Mislovsky. The Tsar wanted the preliminary inquiry and the trial to proceed as smoothly as possible.

Bestuzhev believed that he would be sentenced to imprisonment, and his fondest wish was to share the companionship of Sergei Muravyov, his dearest friend. That is what he told Basargin: "I do not care if it is for life, so long as we are together!"

* * *

Just before sentence was passed the prison regime was slightly relaxed. The prisoners sent each other notes through an old corporal, and sometimes one of them would run out into the corridor for a minute when some other prisoner was being taken out for a walk.

Bestuzhev-Ryumin found an opportunity of telling Basargin:

"If I am taken away to be imprisoned for life, please let my friends and relatives know. Justify me in the eyes of those I was obliged to name during the interrogations. You know what a trying time the Committee gave me."

Towards the end of the inquiry the warders had grown so familiar with and kindly disposed towards the prisoners that one of them—Sokolov—contrived to bring from Milyutin's shop such a great luxury as fresh fruit—oranges, pears and lemons. He refused to take money for them, saying that the salesman, upon learning that the fruit was intended for the "gentlemen prisoners" in the fortress, would not accept a penny from him.

In one of the cells next door to Pestel was an officer whom he only slightly knew—Mikhail Bestuzhev, he who had been the first to come out in Senate Square with his battalion of the Moscow Regiment on December 14th. His thoughts continually dwelling on his elder brother Nikolai, Bestuzhev found himself whistling his favourite tune, and great was his delight when he heard the tune caught up and whistled by someone in the next

cell. The alarmed warders came running up immediately. The brothers fell silent, but contact was established, they had found one another and began to communicate by rapping. Nikolai Bestuzhev, a man of versatile gifts, lost no time in inventing a simple and easy system of signalization, by means of which the brothers communicated daily without being overheard and understood each other perfectly.

Nikolai told his brother of a curious meeting he had had with the Tsar.

"When they brought me to his presence my arms were bound so tightly that the ropes cut into my flesh. Pride alone kept me from crying out, but I said to the Tsar in a fury: 'Your Majesty, if you want to loosen my tongue, order them first to loosen my bonds and give me something to eat—I have not eaten for two days.' " To Nikolai Bestuzhev's astonishment, a court dinner with champagne was served him.

Upon hearing his brother's story, Mikhail Bestuzhev burst out laughing.

This aroused the suspicion of the warders, and the conversation had to be put off until the next evening. Mikhail thought of his brother with pride. He was sure that he had made an irresistible impression upon the "lion," as upon everyone else, by his firmness, coolness and straightforwardness.

Indeed, when the brothers resumed their communication by tapping the next evening, Nikolai related some amazing things. The Tsar suddenly said to him: "As Autocrat I can decide the fate of any one of my subjects at my own discretion. I can punish an offender with death or pardon him. If I were sure that from now on you would become my faithful servant I would pardon you. Answer!"

The warder, looking through the peep-hole, became suspicious and tapped on the pane. Mikhail sprang away

from his "talking corner" and began to pace the cell, thinking with agitation what answer his brother could have given the Tsar. And how drunk with his sense of godlike power the Tsar must have felt when he had made that offer! At that moment, in anticipation of his victim's infinite gratitude, he was no doubt really prepared to grant mercy.

"Tell me, what did you answer the Tsar?" Mikhail tapped out eagerly to his brother as soon as he had an opportunity of resuming the conversation.

"The state criminal Nikolai Bestuzhev disappointed his Majesty's most august expectations," his brother tapped out ironically. "He told the 'lion' reproachfully: 'That is just what we are complaining of, that the Tsar can do anything he pleases and recognizes no law. But, don't you see, people's fate cannot be allowed to depend upon your whims or moods of the moment.'"

"I am proud of you, Nikolai," Mikhail hastened to tap out upon the wall. "What next?"

"Just this: Nikolai Bestuzhev, not having merited the royal mercy, landed in the Alexeyevsky Ravelin next to his brother Mikhail on one side and Alexander Odoyevsky on the other."

"Who else is near?" Mikhail asked.

"Kondrati Rileyev. We must get in touch with him, through Odoyevsky if possible."

However, all attempts to teach Odoyevsky the tapping code were fruitless. He responded so incoherently and wildly that communication with him had to be broken off. Apparently Odoyevsky did not know the Russian alphabet by heart and in its proper order.

Yet it was so important to get in touch with Rileyev! His comrades, who respected him profoundly and loved him, were afraid that his extreme trustfulness would make him fall into the trap which the Committee and the Tsar would set for him.

Nikolai Bestuzhev was cudgelling his brains how to get in touch with Rileyev, when a lucky chance threw them together for a moment.

Enclosed within the silent crypt of the ravelin was a tiny triangular garden with a sickly birch tree and some black-currant bushes. Here the state criminals were taken out in turns for a walk. Rileyev's turn for some reason was always at supper-time. One day the corporal, coming to take away the dishes, opened Nikolai Bestuzhev's cell just as Rileyev was passing.

They rushed towards each other and embraced, but the warders, frightened to death, seized Bestuzhev, pushed him back into his cell and slammed the iron door upon him.

Outwardly always restrained, Nikolai Bestuzhev broke down. Neither could Mikhail keep back his tears when late that night his brother tapped out to him what had happened, describing how emaciated Rileyev had looked, and how dimmed were those eyes which had once burned so brightly.

Both of them dearly loved Rileyev, and suffered keenly when they realized in the course of the proceedings that he was virtually taking all the guilt upon himself. He was setting himself up as the sole source of all the "criminal acts." He would not have been afraid for himself even if he were threatened with sentence of death. But luckily no one was threatened with execution.... That was what nearly all the prisoners in the fortress thought.

Pestel alone had no doubts that the harshest punishment awaited them. It was not long before he guessed the decision the Tsar had arrived at. The Tsar's infatuated belief in his divine prerogative, and hence in his incontestable duty of punishing all who plotted against his life, made only one decision possible—sentence of death to all who conspired against the throne.

In addition to cunning inherited from his father,

the new Tsar proved to have no ordinary gifts of his own—those of dissimulation and intrigue.

Fearing to let the threads of the conspiracy slip out of his hands, suspicious of everyone and trusting no one, Nicholas, during the trial of the state criminals, was self-appointed interrogator, jailer and judge. He went into the minutest details of the inquiry, issued orders who was "to receive tea," who was "to be given tobacco at my expense" and who was "to be kept in irons as the lowest villain." In order to wring out a confession he did not scruple to put on every conceivable mask of falsehood.

In his manner towards the prisoners he played his respective roles like a versatile actor. From fatherly emotion displayed during the interrogation of Kakhovsky, he passed to awe-inspiring ferocity as on the occasion of his first meeting with Baron Steingel, a man of respectable middle age.

"So you are one of them too? You knew and said nothing?"

"I could not give anyone an excuse for calling me a scoundrel," Steingel had answered.

"And now . . . what would you have me call you?"

In dealing with Yakushkin, he shouted at him coarsely, exasperated by the latter's composure and dignified manner.

"If you do not want to be treated as a swine forget that beastly word of honour which you gave your comrades!" And, finally, the royal wrath was vented in a frenzied shriek: "Put him in irons so that he should not be able to stir a limb. Hands and feet! Treat him as the lowest villain!"

He judged a prisoner's guilt not by his acts, but by his facial expression, by his independent behaviour and the absence of that fear and trembling natural in a loyal subject facing his sovereign.

Some prisoners, men of mild disposition, were sometimes caught with the baited hook of royal magnanimity. Themselves trustful and noble-minded, they could not help believing the Tsar's seemingly heartfelt words. And Nicholas, concealing his hatred and aversion for the prisoner, was admirably capable of playing the noble role of a man who was all eagerness to serve his country and looked to his prisoners for help and advice that would enable him, the Tsar, to fulfil that sacred duty.

Some members of the Secret Society were taken in by this skilful play-acting on Nicholas's part and decided that it was their duty to save their comrades and prevent them from taking any further action. The Tsar's benevolence and nobility seemed to them to be beyond a shadow of doubt.

"Where else is a revolt being plotted? Who are those poor blinded men? Whose eyes need opening in a comradely way? Let them know that they have a sincere friend on the throne, not an enemy. I want them to be my allies, and I want to know who they are," the Tsar probed ingratiatingly.

He already knew a great deal from the old reports of the informers Sherwood, Maiboroda and Rostovtsev, and from the proceedings of the preliminary inquiry, and made no secret of it in trying to get the prisoners to corroborate the various names and facts and give him new clues.

And he found trustful souls, inexperienced in lies and pretences.

Perceiving from the Tsar's questions, put with a show of fatherly concern, that the latter was already informed about the movement in the South, Rileyev no longer deemed it necessary to conceal the truth.

"It is my duty as an honest and conscientious citizen," he said with his frank and honest look, "to admit that

a secret society really exists near Kiev among the regiments. Trubetskoy knows all the leading members."

After this Trubetskoy gave their names.

Nicholas earnestly assured his victims that they would not be punished at all, that acting as he was in the sole interests of his beloved country, it was essential for him to learn of all her wounds as quickly as possible the better to be able to heal them.

The Tsar confirmed, as it were, his noble speeches by ostentatious acts of mercy. He released General Raevsky's sons from the fortress, let young Witgenstein and Shipov go scot-free and pardoned Major-General Orlov.

Some of the prisoners had seen Mikhail Orlov upon entering the fortress. He sat by the window in a room overlooking the gate, smoking his pipe.

On December 14th his brother Alexei, commander of the Cavalry Regiment, showed himself to be an ardent supporter of Nicholas, and the Tsar considered himself his lifelong debtor. Alexei Orlov repeatedly begged the Tsar to pardon his brother Mikhail. Having free access to his brother's cell, Alexei dictated to him the answers to the questions of the Committee of Inquiry. At last a favourable opportunity occurred when the Tsar was going to the Communion. Alexei Orlov threw himself at his feet and pleaded once more for his brother. Nicholas, in a surge of royal generosity, granted his wish and pardoned Major-General Orlov. Late in the night a closed vehicle drew up at officers' quarters of the fortress, and two guards, humbly acknowledging the generous tip, helped the eminent prisoner, wrapped in a fur-lined coat, into the sleigh. Orlov left immediately for his own estate, to which he was banished for life.

The prisoners in the fortress spoke about him without envy, but with bitterness and surprise. Ivan Yakushkin was more distressed than anyone else.

The last time he had met Mikhail Orlov was that

memorable evening in Moscow when a conference was called to discuss how best to bring the Moscow troops out in support of St. Petersburg. Pushchin's stirring letter had been received, containing the following lines: "If we do not help them now we deserve to be called scoundrels." And everyone had been ready to start the rising, even if it was too late to help St. Petersburg, in order to keep his pledge to the Secret Society and his comrades.

Suddenly it had become known that a courier had come dashing up to the Governor-General's in an open sleigh with a message direct from Nicholas, saying: "We have just put out a fire here. Take steps to prevent one breaking out with you." Immediately, in the Cathedral of the Assumption, Metropolitan Filaret had carried out of the altar the little golden casket containing Russia's destiny — Tsar Alexander's Will and Testament in favour of Nicholas. The whole of Moscow had then taken the oath to Nicholas. Doubts had arisen in the minds of the members of the Moscow Secret Society as to whether General Fonvizin should raise the troops in the Khamovniki barracks or not. A decision had to be made in this connection, and Yakushkin had been sent to General Mikhail Orlov, who lived near the Donskoy Monastery, to invite him to the meeting.

Orlov was in dress uniform, with the great ribbon and decorations, and one would have thought he had just returned from the ceremony of the oath, had he not hastened to declare: "I cannot go to any meetings—I have reported myself ill so as not to take the oath. You had better take him to the meeting instead," he said, pointing to Mukhanov, who had just come in. "He is personally acquainted with those who took part in the rising of December 14th."

Mukhanov was a red-haired man of unpleasant manners whom Yakushkin had never met before. He had

struck Yakushkin as a frivolous boaster when he declared airily:

"Someone must go to St. Petersburg at once and kill Nicholas. You can hide quite a small pistol in the sword-hilt and fire point-blank."

Yakushkin, who was a straightforward man, had not liked all this, and bowing to Orlov he had said with a hint of irony:

"Under present circumstances you are running risks by associating with me. I promise to make no more calls on you."

And now Yakushkin, his feelings outraged by Orlov's secret release from the fortress, found himself comparing him with Mikhail Lunin, who had been brought there recently. All knew now that the Crown Prince Constantine had persistently urged him to leave the country, and had himself brought him the necessary passport and offered to furnish him with money, but Lunin had flatly refused, saying: "I share the convictions of my comrades, and now, when they are in prison, I shall share their fate, too."

Meanwhile the Tsar continued his crafty and calculating game, trying by every artful means to inspire in the prisoners a feeling of trust and gratitude. The royal kindness found expression in a variety of ways. To Rileyev's wife, who was living in poverty, the Tsar sent two thousand rubles in his own name, and the Empress made Rileyev's daughter Nastya a birthday present of another thousand. Obolensky, who adored his old father and was worried to death by the absence of news from him, suddenly had a letter handed to him. But most admirably of all did the Tsar play his role before Kakhovsky. Nicholas closely studied him and came to understand his romantic nature. He spoke with Kakhovsky as a true friend who held the same views as he did. Finally, Nicholas em-

braced Kakhovsky, shedding a gentle tear, and murmured: "And you wanted to kill us all!"

Kakhovsky's heart melted, and he, like many another, believed that the young monarch lived and breathed only to serve his country and be a father to his subjects.

Actually, Nicholas was utterly devoid of generosity, and not for a moment did he doubt the cruel verdict he had in store for the prisoners he had shown such kindness to. The Queen Mother, moreover, kept urging him to take the most drastic measures to stamp out the revolutionary spirit once and for all.

Nicholas made the most of his time. Already on May 6th he drafted an order for the setting up of a Supreme Criminal Court, and on the twenty-ninth the War Minister Tatishchev notified Speransky that "His Majesty the Emperor desires your presence at Tsarskoye Selo to submit the necessary papers in connection with the Supreme Criminal Court."

Nicholas was determined to make the death sentence for the ringleaders a foregone conclusion before that Court started to function. His dignity as a monarch, too, demanded severe punishment after the affront it had suffered in Senate Square on the fourteenth of December.

On the third of June, when no official verdict had yet been returned, Nicholas wrote to his brother Constantine: "The trial began on Thursday and lasted from ten in the morning till three in the afternoon, after which the execution will take place. I intend to have it held on the fortress esplanade."

All the proceedings and conclusions of the Supreme Criminal Court were arranged beforehand. Even the chairmen of the Revisory Committee were placed within set limits. The members of the Court were forbidden to enter into any discussion with the defendants, and the Revisory Committee was to put only three questions to each of the accused, from whom they were to secure

replies in the affirmative. These questions were: "Is the defendant's deposition written in his own hand?" "Did he sign it of his own free will?" "Was he given a confrontation?"

* * *

The interrogations to which Pestel and other members of the Secret Society were subjected and the evidence of witnesses provided the material necessary for building up an accusation involving the death penalty. In its ultimate form Pestel's guilt was set forth in the following terms: "...He was continuously and zealously active in the ranks of the Southern Society from first to last. He not only had absolute control of the Southern Society, but a decisive influence on the affairs of the Northern Society as well. He dominated his fellow members, fascinated them by his extensive learning, and roused their enthusiasm by his speeches. His intention was criminally to destroy the existing form of government, overthrow the throne and take the lives of the royal family."

In a word, Pestel was the head of the Society and the mainspring behind all its actions.

The Supreme Criminal Court, having established eleven categories of guilt for all the accused, singled out five men—Pestel, Muravyov-Apostol, Bestuzhev-Ryumin, Rileyev and Kakhovsky—who came under none of these legal categories.

Meanwhile, the prisoners in the Fortress of Peter and Paul knew nothing of this. The Committee of Inquiry now met less often, and lately the judges' manner had in it a shade of paternal geniality.

One of the Committee members once said to Lorer:

"You must admit, Major, that all your free-thinking came from harmful books. Now take me, I haven't read anything in my life except the church calendar, with the result that I am wearing three stars on my chest!"

On another occasion one of the defendants caused a diversion among the Committee members when, wearied by the monotonous examination, he turned to the old generals, who were all decorated with medals, and exclaimed:

"If you were junior officers now, you would certainly be members of the Secret Society!"

In short, the prisoners' spirits had risen considerably. The surveillance of the guards, who had got used to their prisoners, was greatly relaxed. The warders themselves now carried notes and rumours from cell to cell. One such rumour, supposed to have originated in town, conveyed the cheerful news that the trial would be held in the Senate with open doors.

Even those who did not believe the rumour felt cheered. Not for a moment did any one doubt that he would have the right to defend himself at the trial. The Tsar had been at great pains to strengthen the belief in his mercy and benevolence, which, he had promised, would "amaze Europe."

And amaze it he did.

One morning an unusual sound was heard beneath the windows of the casemates—the hoof-beats of two squadrons of mounted gendarmes. The prisoners climbed onto the window-sills, and through the barred, white-washed windows could, with difficulty, make out a stream of carriages with senators and clergy moving majestically towards the entrance of the Commandant's house.

Conjecture ran wild as to what this could mean. Presently the doors of the solitary cells were opened and the warders, accompanied by the noseless Assistant Commandant Podushkin, brought the prisoners their own clothes. Then, in the usual order, the prisoners were conducted to the Commandant's house. There, in a small room into which they were ushered one at a time, one of

the senators set before each man a copy of his own deposition and politely asked him to confirm its authenticity by signing his name, for "it pleases His Majesty to verify the impartiality of the Committee's actions."

There were over a hundred prisoners, and the senator was in a hurry. The men signed their names without reading the documents, the more so that the senator did not let go the dossier and one could only turn the leaves over perfunctorily.

It occurred to none of the prisoners that this was the last thing required of them before sentence was announced.

* * *

The five "non-category" men were sentenced to be quartered, and those classed under the first category were to be beheaded.

The grounds for this decision were given in the following words:

"...Surpassing all others in evil intent, they stand beyond all comparison in their ferocious malice, their savage tenacity and their cold-blooded readiness to commit regicide."

Such cruel punishments would not have occurred to the judges had they not been given to understand from above that "the Tsar desires the sentence to be of extreme severity, so that in mitigating it he may be enabled more markedly to show his mercy."

Prince Lopukhin, the President of the Supreme Criminal Court, was handed a letter in which the royal will was distinctly expressed. His Majesty, it appeared, "had not sanctioned" quartering, shooting or beheading—in short, any capital punishment "involving the shedding of blood."

Nicholas showed the promised mercy through his Adjutant-General without touching pen or paper. Quartering was commuted to hanging, and beheading to penal

servitude for life. The other ten categories were sentenced to penal servitude.

Such was the sentence passed by the arbitrary will of the Tsar, without benefit of trial or self-defence.

The first to have the sentence announced to them were the five doomed men.

Pestel, Rileyev, Muravyov-Apostol, Bestuzhev-Ryumin and Kakhovsky, surrounded by an armed guard, were slowly conducted through the rooms of the Commandant's house to the large hall where the proceedings of the Committee of Inquiry had been held.

The door of the hall was shut, but when the prisoners approached two officials threw it open before them with calculated effect.

A solemn spectacle was revealed to the prisoners. A huge table covered with a red cloth stood in the middle of the hall. In the centre sat four Metropolitans with glittering diamond-studded crosses on snow-white hoods. On either side of them sat the members of the Council of State and generals in their decorations and regalia. The other seats round the table were occupied by senators. The windows in the ancient low-ceilinged hall were shut. The July sun blazed hotly and the generals in their dress uniforms were half-suffocated.

The prisoners stood in a row facing the senators and the church dignitaries. Rileyev found himself between Pestel and Sergei Muravyov. Their joy at seeing one another was so overwhelming that they missed the opening words of the paper that was being read out.

Muravyov touched Bestuzhev's hand and looked at his face, grown haggard and old after six months' imprisonment, with such love as if he would pour into him all his own strength and courage. During those painful minutes he was a tower of strength to his young friend. Bestuzhev-Ryumin's dimmed eyes lit up again with their old gallant fire.

Kakhovsky stood with an air of gloom, his heart filled with wrath and bitterness. He was still unable to shake off the horror of the Tsar's sinister play-acting, which now stood utterly revealed. He was furious with himself. How could he, like a youth melting under the paternal caress, let himself be trapped into telling everything he knew with utter candour! How sincerely he had believed the Tsar's assurance that this candour was necessary for his country's good! The Tsar, having wormed the secrets out of him, had robbed his soul and thrown him to the executioners.

With eyes harassed through lack of sleep, Kakhovsky stared bleakly at the large reading-desk, which was like a lectern in church from which prayers are read. The desk had been placed in front of the table at which the brilliant uniforms sat enthroned. It seemed as if there were no faces above those uniforms.

On the desk lay a huge book. A fair-haired dapper official opened it with a theatrical gesture and began to read out the sentence which the Supreme Court, obedient to the Tsar's will, had passed upon the accused men without trial.

The dapper official was absorbed in his role like an actor playing to a large audience. He proclaimed each man's crimes with a flourish, punctuated with pregnant pauses.

"Kondrati Rileyev plotted regicide and assigned a member of the Secret Society to perpetrate the deed. That member...."

Kakhovsky looked up sharply. Another moment, it seemed, and he would shout out: "It is a lie! I volunteered myself. No one appointed me. What I intended doing was a deed of valour, the highest duty of a citizen, and not an act of banditism on Rileyev's orders!"

But looking round the table with burning eyes, he held his peace, and bit his lip until it bled. The church dignitaries and senators stood up the better to see the "crimi-

nals." The dapper official, in a voice expressive of extreme indignation, read the motives that had induced the court to single out the "special five."

"... Surpassing all others in evil intent, they stand beyond all comparison in their ferocious malice, their savage tenacity and their cold-blooded readiness to commit regicide. The Court has sentenced them to capital punishment."

The doomed men received the verdict in an impassive silence. One would think they had not heard a word of that awful sentence.

Rileyev even smiled and whispered to Pestel: "Now we are together!"

Pestel responded with a smile, and Muravyov, as though joining them, looked at them with eyes that were radiant with deep feeling.

The official went on slowly, lingering on the words with relish:

"Sentenced to capital punishment by quartering."

There was a stir among the semicircle of generals, judges, and dignitaries of the church. Someone uttered a low exclamation.

The condemned men did not flinch. They looked puzzled, if anything—so strange did that archaic word sound in the mouth of the official. Their minds had not taken in the full import of that sentence.

Suddenly Bestuzhev-Ryumin was reminded of Emelyan Pugachov. It was he who had been sentenced to quartering! The executioner, taking pity on that national hero, had cut his head off quickly instead of subjecting him to a slow and horrible death. That executioner had been compassionate, but these?

The official paused impressively, then solemnly announced:

"The decision mitigating this sentence in accordance with the monarch's most merciful injunction is as fol-

lows: Pavel Pestel, Kondrati Rileyev, Sergei Muravyov-Apostol, Mikhail Bestuzhev-Ryumin and Pyotr Kakhovsky are sentenced to be *hanged*."

Pestel thought of his father, that old soldier. If only the news that his son had been sentenced to the gallows could be kept from him! If he had been sentenced to be shot the old man would have taken it easier. Muravyov squeezed Bestuzhev's hand, mutely appealing to him to keep his head. Kakhovsky looked aside scornfully. Rileyev pensively contemplated a picture on the wall.

The behaviour of the condemned men disappointed their judges, who had expected sobbings, swoonings, pleadings for mercy, anything but this perfect composure.

Neither was there anything for the physicians to do. They had been summoned by the prison authorities who, in accordance with the imperial order, were responsible for the sound health of the state criminals so that the order and ritual of execution devised by the Tsar, should not be upset.

The "special five," outwardly perfectly calm, were escorted back to their cells.

The door of the hall closed behind them. Shortly afterwards it was flung open again with calculated effect to admit a larger group of prisoners condemned under the first category.

While waiting outside the door they had had an opportunity of speaking to one another.

Yakushkin found himself next to Bestuzhev-Marlinsky and Küchelbecker, and could not help smiling when those two friends, who had worked together on the *Polyarnaya Zvezda*, embraced each other. Küchelbecker was still wearing his now ragged short fur coat, fur cap and felt boots—he had been arrested in Warsaw in the winter. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, aide-de-camp to the Prince of Württemberg, was wearing a new dress uniform. All were delighted to see Pushchin.

His comrades had been worried on his account. Rumours had trickled through into the cells that Pushchin had roused the special ire of the Committee of Inquiry by refusing to name the person who had enrolled him into the Society, and moreover taunting the judges by giving fictitious names.

Now, glad almost of this opportunity which had brought them together again, they eagerly began to ask each other questions.

"I hope Pushkin is not in the fortress?" Küchelbecker whispered in a frightened voice.

"I've been thinking of that all the time," Pushchin answered, equally agitated. "On the eve of the December events, I wrote him to come secretly to St. Petersburg. He was under surveillance at Mikhailovskoye, you know, banished there. Luckily something prevented him from coming, otherwise, of course, he would have attended our last meeting at Rileyev's on the evening of the thirteenth, and on the fourteenth he would have come out into the square with me and would now have been in the fortress. He may still land in the fortress, though," Pushchin added sorrowfully. "Basargin told me the other day.... His cell is next to that of Bestuzhev-Ryumin's. Lately they have been able to hold some sort of communication, and Bestuzhev said that the Committee had collected a big dossier against Pushkin. They have been trying to find out where those incendiary verses come from."

"I know that the Committee was specially interested in Pushkin's *The Dagger*," Küchelbecker interrupted him.

"Did you hear what Lieutenant Gromnicki, a member of the Slav League, did with *The Dagger*?" Yakushkin broke in. "On hearing that the Tsar had ordered all verses in praise of liberty to be removed from the dossiers, Gromnicki did a crazy thing. In answer to the question as to what free-thinking literature he had read, he wrote the whole of Pushkin's *The Dagger* on the inter-

rogatory without mentioning who the author was. And it could not be removed, because our young comrade wrote the verse on the back of his deposition."

Everyone laughed.

"He has recorded it for all time!"

"And recorded not only the undying verse of the poet but the undying stupidity of the authorities," added Küchelbecker. "The War Minister crossed out Pushkin's verse and wrote under it: 'Scratched out with His Majesty's approval by Tatishchev, War Minister and Chairman of the Committee of Inquiry.' He has only disgraced his own name without erasing the memory of Pushkin's verse in the minds of the Russian people!"

"I wonder what Pestel, Rileyev and Muravyov have been sentenced to? It worries me," Pushchin said quietly.

Yakushkin reassured him, however. The priest Mislovsky had persuaded him that the death sentence, even if it were passed, would only be nominal.

Yakushkin's confidence communicated itself to the rest, and the "first category" calmly entered the hall which the "special five" had just quitted.

The prisoners were surprised to learn from the mouth of the same dapper official that on the findings of the Committee of Inquiry they were condemned to death by beheading.

"Captain Yakushkin for conspiring against the life of the Tsar...."

"Captain Nikita Muravyov for being an accomplice in the conspiracy...."

Nearly all the "first category" were condemned for sundry versions of the same "conspiracy" and for "plotting mutiny."

And then, after a significant pause, the "royal mercy" was proclaimed in the same solemn tones. Beheading was commuted to penal servitude for life.

Nikolai Bestuzhev, brave and proud as ever, stepped forward with a sudden flash of anger when the official had finished reading, and demanded:

"On what legal grounds has this verdict been founded? We have not been tried yet!"

The judges waved their hands at him and hissed him into silence. A guard sprang up, and the daring offender was hastily led out of the hall, followed by the others.

While the "first category" were being escorted back to their cells they had an opportunity to snatch a few more words.

"The government's harsh sentence will only contribute to the success of our cause," said Pushchin. "They have made us martyrs in the eyes of the people. That will excite universal sympathy for us and stir noble hearts to follow in our footsteps."

"Our cause will not die, it cannot be crushed now. It will become history," voices responded.

"And the first to be remembered will be the name of Pavel Pestel," Lorer said with deep emotion. "How happy I am, friends, that I was able to embrace him for the last time perhaps. . . ."

"When? Where?"

"While you were engaged in talking about Pushkin, the door in the next room opened slightly and I caught a glimpse of all five. I rushed up to Pestel and said: 'I gave evidence about your *Russkaya Pravda* only after I had seen your own confession. Otherwise, believe me, I would have been silent.' 'I believe you, my friend,' he answered. That was all we managed to say to each other."

* * *

After the sentence had been pronounced the prisoners were removed to new quarters. On entering his new cell, Pestel glanced at the damp walls and the tiny window right under the ceiling.

"While the interrogations lasted they had to take care of my health, but now it does not matter, it will soon be over," he thought ironically with a feeling almost akin to relief. "There will be no more questions, no more confrontations. Poor Mother, and sister Sonya. . . ."

It was more than a month since Pestel had been allowed to see his father. Crushed with grief, the old man had grown decrepit, and it was only by force of military habit that he still bore up under the blow.

The old man suddenly assumed a pitiful swagger in the presence of the Commandant, who invariably attended all prison meetings. He could not contain himself, and said with pride: "They pity my son in the capital and think him a most worthy man."

At parting, however, he broke down and wept.

The sight of the stricken old man was more than Pestel could bear, and he decided that these meetings were better dispensed with. He now had the most priceless gift from home he could wish for—a letter full of love and tenderness, written in his mother's shaky hand, which his father had brought him. He carried it next to his heart.

He wished to write to his mother, but unwonted tears dimmed his eyes. He got up and began to pace his cell, limping badly on one foot. His old wound had been aching for a long time owing to the prison damp.

"That isn't for long now either," thought Pestel, and transferred his thoughts to a man who had been a great comfort to him during his imprisonment. That man was his orderly Stepan Savchenko.

Yushnevsky's wife, through her Polish relatives, had succeeded in having a letter delivered to Pestel while still in Tulchin, when he was confined in a cell of the Bernardine Monastery. The letter was about the evidence

Savchenko had given during the interrogations held in Tulchin after his arrest, which had followed closely upon Pestel's.

"I can imagine the inane air he put on, as he usually does when he wants to fool anyone," Pestel thought. That sharp-witted and devoted man had declared in his evidence that all the people who came to the Colonel's rooms always spoke French, a language of which he was totally ignorant. He could remember only one occasion, at dinner, when the officers spoke Russian. He remembered that conversation word for word and could cite it in his evidence. "The gentlemen were very sorry for the late Tsar when they came to the Colonel's lodgings for dinner after taking the oath. And Colonel Pestel said—it stuck in my mind: 'I was heart-broken when I learned that the Tsar had died!'"

Pestel smiled, and thought with tenderness: "Your naïve diplomacy has been a poor help to both of us."

Moved at the memory of Savchenko, that ordinary Russian soldier, Pestel found himself thinking of the thousands of others like him. "Some day they will understand our cause, and when they do, they will take matters in hand themselves. They will be sure to win freedom then."

It was with a tranquil and lucid mind that Pestel sat down to write his last letter to his mother.

"...All my life I have loved you dearly. And your blessing is a real comfort to me. The story of my life can be given in a few words: I passionately loved my country and wanted her to be happy. I sought that happiness in schemes, which have now brought me to...."

He broke off. He could not prevail upon himself to write to his mother that his most cherished thoughts and feelings had brought him to the gallows.

He sat for several minutes sunk deep in thought, then forced himself to finish the letter: "I am not afraid to die. Death is even more welcome than imprisonment for life."

CHAPTER TEN

On July 12th, 1826, a roll of drums sounded in various parts of the capital, and a detail from each regiment of the Guards set out for Peter and Paul Fortress.

The troops had been ordered to attend the ceremony at which the members of the Secret Society condemned to penal servitude were to be deprived of military and civil rank. After the ceremony the troops were to form a cordon round the square containing the gallows with five ropes.

The executioners, who were to hang the "special five," had been brought from Finland at the Tsar's command.

The procedure to be followed in the execution of both sentences had been worked out by Nicholas himself, who sent a corresponding order in his own hand to Baron Dibich, the Chief of Staff, with the following postscript: "I want the sentences to be executed at about five in the morning, to enable them to hear early mass."

* * *

The early morning beams of the July sun had not yet dispersed the mist over the Neva, and the fortress with its endless spire looked like a dim shadow.

The prisoners, whom the guards had let out of their cells, looked like ghosts. They were escorted across the bridge between the Alexeyevsky Ravelin and the fortress. Their faces were deathly pale and emaciated.

The friends, who had grown beards, hardly recognized each other when they met. Long-legged Küchelbecker, looking taller than ever, peered short-sightedly at the dim

figures through the gloom. Suddenly he recognized Alexander Bestuzhev and rushed up at once to embrace him.

Alexander Bestuzhev, in his brilliant uniform, stood out oddly among the crowd of condemned men, and set off the incongruous figure of Küchelbecker, who was still wearing his ragged fur coat and worn-down felt boots.

The prisoners had no time to exchange a word with each other. Their guards conducted them straight to the square, where all the condemned men were to be mustered.

Alexander Bestuzhev looked round the square intently. Here, outside the guard-house, there had once stood a wooden horse with a sharp spine, and next to it a post with a chain. The ground had had pointed sticks planted in it around the post. The offender was made to sit on the horse or stand on the sticks. This spot still retained the humorous name of "Dance Square" by which it was known among the soldiers. Bestuzhev had once intended writing a "comic" song about this square in co-operation with Rileyev. Where could he be? What had happened to him?

New parties of prisoners were escorted to the square from other curtains of the fortress, but still there was no sign of Rileyev. Bestuzhev's heart sank.

There proved to be more prisoners than one would have thought. Many of them were total strangers to Bestuzhev, and sudden recognitions of others came with a shock of surprise.

They moved towards each other slowly, carefully avoiding the vigilance of the guards.

Mikhail Bestuzhev, the youthful bloom still on his face, gazed at his brother with eyes of admiration and whispered to him:

"I don't suppose they will send you to Siberia, like us. You will probably be a private somewhere in the Caucasus, and although the sun will scorch you there, at least

your talent will be saved! There is so much you have to do yet, Alexander."

"I'm afraid I won't get any chance," his brother answered gloomily. "The Tsar will see to that. Between two evils 'tis not worth choosing. The only thing I'm afraid of is that I'll be parted from you and brother Nikolai. But it is not my own fate that worries me just now. I cannot shake off the horrible thought of what is going to happen to Rileyev, Pestel, Muravyov, and those other two."

"My conscience gives me no peace," said Mikhail. "To think that only a few days before the rising the Tsar's life was in my hands!"

"How is that?" Alexander said. "On the eve of the fourteenth we all dined at Mamma's place, the whole family—for the last time in our lives," he added to himself, "and you said nothing about it."

"I had other things on my mind. Listen. I was on duty at the palace, guarding the peace of Nicholas, who was frightened to death. The plot had been reported to him and he had ordered the duty officer to make the change of the guards at his door himself. The corridor was in total darkness, with only a faint light burning at the end of it. One guard had to step off a round little mat, and the other to step on it. In the dark their muskets crossed and the cocking pieces clashed with a noise. The Tsar flew out of his room half-dressed. He was shaking with terror and could not conceal it. 'Who was it . . . clicked the cock of his gun?' he stuttered. He recognized me, though. 'Be on the look-out, Bestuzhev!'

"He'll never forgive me for having witnessed his cowardice, I thought. As a matter of fact, at my very first interrogation, he flew into a rage and shouted to Chernishov: 'There, you see, so young and already an unmitigated scoundrel! But for him there wouldn't have been this mess. The best part of it is that he was guard-

ing me on the very eve of the mutiny!' He snatched a piece of paper and wrote an order to the Commandant to put me in irons."

Alexander squeezed his brother's hand and said with anguish in his voice:

"Can you see Rileyev anywhere? I am short-sighted. He *must* be here. I just can't believe the awful rumours I have heard."

"And rightly so," said Yakushkin, standing nearby. "The priest Mislovsky told me not to believe my own ears if I heard anything about a death sentence. We of the first category were originally sentenced to be beheaded, but the sentence has been commuted, you see."

Yakushkin fell silent. Then, as if to strengthen his own hopes, shaken for a minute by doubt, he added:

"Those scoundrels will no doubt drag out the mental torture of the five right up to the gallows, but there will be no execution—I am sure of that."

The mist dispersed as if it had never been, and the cadaverous faces of the prisoners in their motley garb stood out starkly.

Nikita Muravyov took the arm of his cousin Lunin.

"It was rumoured, my dear," he said, lowering his voice, "that Constantine urged you to leave the country. Everyone knows that he is kindly disposed towards you, but I suppose fear for his own skin played no little part in it, too. He was in no particular hurry to abdicate."

"I don't know what his reasons were, but the Crown Prince did actually insist on my running away," Lunin answered. "He brought me a passport himself and said to me in his husky voice: 'You'd better go while the going is good. That brother of mine has grabbed hold of the Russian crown and anyone who dares to challenge him will be signing his own death warrant.'"

"And you refused to take the passport?" Nikita asked,

staring at Lunin, of whom his friends said that he had a face "painted by the brush of a Van Dyck."

"I shared the convictions of my arrested comrades," Lunin said simply, "and considered myself bound to share their fate, too. I did not take the passport, but got three days' leave on my word of honour that I would be back in time. I had a splendid time, hunting and shooting! Got back as I had promised, punctual to the minute. Constantine said: 'He's a dangerous man to have as a room-mate—he'll cut your throat—but his word is good.'"

"Just like you," laughed Muravyov. "I don't care where we are so long as we keep together."

"The Tsar will see to it that we are safely out of his way," said Lunin. "Of all the Romanovs this one is the most vicious. Constantine is a bit of a brute, but at least he isn't spiteful. Nicholas has the eyes of a medusa and likes people to turn to stone before him, otherwise he'll crush them to powder. I don't care how far away he sends us so long as we are together, Nikita. You alone are a fount of wisdom, a tower of strength. By the way, what answer did you give to the idiotic question of the Committee of Inquiry as to where you were taught free-thinking ideas? I wrote in answer to that question: 'I formed the habit of free-thinking the moment I was capable of thinking at all.'"

"In other words," Nikita said, smiling, "love of liberty and thinking are inseparable to anyone who is not fool-born! And I found a way of maddening the Tsar by stating with an innocent air that my liberal ideas were due to the late Tsar Alexander with his public speech in Warsaw and his promises of a constitution."

"Implying that the Tsar himself was the springhead of free-thinking ideas! Very clever!"

Yakushkin, an old friend of Nikita's, came up and shook hands warmly with him and Lunin.

"You were the last man I thought of seeing here, Lunin," he said. "I was glad that at least you and Turgenev had evaded the autocrat's claws."

"It would have been stupid of Turgenev, of course, to return, once he lives abroad. But it ill-suited me to run away from danger. If I could face the wild boar, I could face this."

"I was told that you had behaved impertinently at the interrogations," Nikita said to Yakushkin. "The warders told me confidentially that the Commandant had the Tsar's instructions to treat you as the 'lowest villain.'"

"I was not impertinent at all," Yakushkin said, smiling. "They interrogated me in the Hermitage, in the great hall where the portrait of Pope Clement hangs. In a corner, at a card-table, sat General Levashov, an old acquaintance, who had taught us horsemanship in the Manège. He invited me politely to sit down and give names. 'Who else was present when you volunteered to strike the blow in 1818?' Then he twirled his moustache and added: 'We have ways of making you speak. Torture, you know.' 'That won't help you at all,' I said. They called me out into another hall, the one with Salvator Rosa's 'Prodigal Son'—I shall never forget it. Looking at the wonderful cow in the foreground, I let my fancy run wild: 'If I could only hide myself behind her carcass, and beat a retreat into the woods!' The threat of torture scared me a bit, I must confess. Nevertheless, when I was summoned to the royal presence and saw his face transfigured with a kind of icy rage, I repeated the same thing and did not drop my eyes under his basilisk stare. That seemed to madden the Tsar. He stamped his feet in a most ungentlemanly way and shouted: 'Put him in irons! So that he should not be able to stir hand or foot!'"

"Our fate is clear, deplorable though it is," said Lunin.

"But who knows what fate has in store for our dear comrades—Pestel and Rileyev?"

He suddenly started and rushed impetuously towards the guards, who had at that moment brought the last party of prisoners out into the square. Among them was Nikolai Lorer. He had such a white face, contorted with anger and pain, that Lunin asked him sharply: "What is the matter now?"

Lorer pointed in silence to the glacis of the fortress.

Two brawny men in red shirts stood on a raised platform next to some posts driven into the ground. On top of the posts was a cross-piece from which hung five ropes. The red-shirted men, in a sort of frolicsome humour, suddenly gripped the ropes and began to spin at a dizzy speed.

"They are testing the ropes..." Lorer said horror-struck. "They have brought the executioners from Finland. Couldn't find men here fit for the job. My warder knows all about it."

"Murderous mummers!" Yakushkin exclaimed angrily.

"Dress!" rapped out the Assistant Commandant, and signalled to the prison guards to draw the ring closer around the prisoners. They were conducted farther to the grass-plot facing the ramparts where the troops stood lined up.

On the right, at the end of the Troitsky Bridge, held in check by a cordon of soldiers, stood a surging crowd.

The Tsar was so afraid of collecting a large crowd that he ordered a rumour to be spread that the whole ceremony was to take place at Volkov Field. The awe-stricken crowd rushed off in that direction.

Here, by the fortress, the crowd was a comparatively small one. It consisted for the most part of people who lived in the neighbourhood and who had been struck by the unusual activities taking place in the regulated life of the fortress.

On the grass-plot, which was surrounded by troops, the soldiers built large bonfires and kept them blazing high.

It struck the prisoners as odd that somewhere close at hand, just beyond the high fortress wall, there flowed the Neva, that on the other side of it there stood magnificent palaces where they had often attended resplendent balls, and a little farther, on the Fontanka, had gathered in the house of the Turgenev brothers to discuss the affairs of the Secret Society. How short the way from the palaces to the fortress had proved to be!

The troops stood as it was their custom to stand, like graven images with muskets gripped in their hands. Their commanding officers kept a vigilant eye upon them. The new Governor-General in place of Miloradovich rode round the meadow with a stern frown, trying to impart to his unprepossessing figure an air of importance.

The soldiers stood as if petrified, devouring the officers with their eyes, but when the General passed, they shifted their gaze to the motley throng of prisoners in brilliant uniforms, black frock-coats, and prison robes, and their faces grew stern and sad. The hard set of their mouths with clenched teeth betrayed their inner emotion. Many of the condemned officers were known to them, some of them they dearly loved for their kind treatment, for stoutly defending the soldiers' interests and saving them from floggings.

"Why do they stand opposed to us with arms in hand when their eyes show sympathy towards us? Who is to blame for that? My God, we ourselves are to blame," Alexander Bestuzhev thought bitterly. "All I did was to bring the Moscow Regiment out into the square, and I stood there doing nothing while the men were just spoiling for a fight. We did not understand each other. Perhaps we ought to have explained our ideas to them?"

They would have understood who was right, as they understand now...."

The blood rose to his face at the memory of how, clad in dress uniform with white buckskins, he had pulled out his sword and started to sharpen the blade on the pedestal of Peter the Great's statue. "Yes, it was our own fault," he said to himself, "we had not matured for full trust and brotherhood with the muzhik and the soldier. And this is the result. Although they sympathize with us, they will shoot us and hang us if ordered to do so."

"Cult of the fire-worshippers," Nikita Muravyov said ironically to Lunin with a nod towards the bonfires. "And how picturesquely you are illumined!"

The flames from the nearest bonfire vividly lit up the tall stately figure of Lunin in his hussar's uniform, with prison slippers instead of lacquered high-boots.

Lunin looked down at his feet and smiled.

"My boots were stolen, and the Commandant's assistant couldn't find the culprit. These fires, I suppose, are meant to crown our disgrace. Before we are turned into convicts for life we are, according to the Tsar's order, to be treated with ignominy, that is to say, each of us will have his sword broken over his head and the fragments thrown into the fire. A mediaeval touch!"

Suddenly giving rein to his anger, he went on furiously:

"What a vile comedy the whole thing is! The trial, the inquiry, the execution.... I shall find the words to tell our descendants about it! It is worth living for even in a convicts' prison. I shall find ways of carrying on our cause even there. I will shout it to the world that we went to meet ruin and death only for the sake of our people's freedom. It is a libel that we merely plotted the destruction of the dynasty like adventurers, like operatic villains. To the devil with it! It is merely an obstruction, like a log in one's path. It was to be kicked

aside, that's all. But the true meaning of our great aim must be made clear. I will expose Nicholas to the world for what he is—the meanest scoundrel of the pack, who, hiding behind the backs of his executives, worked all the strings that set them in motion!”

Gorbachevsky, hearing Lunin's wrathful speech, came up and said in an undertone:

“Our autocracy is so loathsome that Russia will not stand it! They may pack us off to Siberia, but others will rise. Look here, Lunin, I just saw something from the window of my cell which I shall never forget. It cries for vengeance if nothing else does.”

Lit up by the flames of the bonfire, his face, all overgrown with long hair, looked ghastly.

“You came with the last party, did you not?” Lunin asked.

“Yes, I was sitting in my cell after all the others had been taken away. It was two in the morning. I heard a clank of chains under my window. I climbed up on the sill and looked out—the five were being escorted by a squad of Pavlovsky Grenadiers. Bestuzhev-Ryumin got entangled in his chains and couldn't move a step further. The non-commissioned officer helped him to disentangle them. My warder came in—he and I are friends. ‘Where are they taking them?’ I asked him. ‘To church, to hear their own funeral service. The Tsar's order,’ the warder said, and there was horror in his eyes. And Russia? Will Russia forget?”

Tears ran down Gorbachevsky's hairy face. Lunin placed his hand on his shoulder, which was shaken by sobs.

“Their destruction will be the victory of posterity,” Lunin uttered solemnly. “Believe me, future generations will build their society on the very principles for which we are now undergoing political death.” He stood up on a knoll and looked round once more at the familiar and

unfamiliar faces with a keen eye. He still hoped to detect among the crowd the sturdy figure of Pestel, the slight little figure of Rileyev with his huge burning eyes, or Bestuzhev-Ryumin with the profile of a Roman centurion.

But none of the five were there.

There came the final stage of the ceremony.

The condemned men were split up into groups. The guardsmen were formed into a small square, and the rest were removed to the army units. The sailors were put aboard a long-boat and taken to Kronstadt. The formal execution of their sentence was to take place aboard the Admiral's ship.

"Even here we have the table of ranks and classes," said the elder Borisov, who found himself standing next to Gorbachevsky. He raised his swarthy gypsy face with a flash of his mocking eyes. "Even in disgrace the guardsmen are accorded greater honour than we are!"

An official approached and, in a droning priest-like voice, began to read a circular explaining to the state criminals the meaning of the "political disability" attaching to their sentences. No one listened to him.

The condemned officers were lined up facing their companies. Matrosses, at a word of command, raised swords aloft. The sword had to be broken over the bared head of the officer and the fragments thrown into the fire as a sign of disgrace.

To enable the sword to be broken without a hitch, it was filed down beforehand.

The ceremony started with Yakushkin. He found it unutterably stupid. When the matross struck him over the head with the sword, which refused to break because he had not filed it down sufficiently, Yakushkin grew angry in real earnest.

"Damn it all, you can kill a man that way!" he said.

The Governor-General pranced on his horse before the troops and made signs to the men to tear the decorations

and uniforms off the condemned officers and throw them into the fire.

The Tsar and his devoted servants believed that this procedure would bring home to the officers the full ignominy of their punishment, whilst the fires that consumed their former decorations and marks of honour were to symbolize, as it were, the utter destruction of all their rights, dreams and hopes, which had turned to ashes.

The Tsar had expected the ceremony to provide an instructive spectacle of moral suffering and repentance, in which the condemned men, stricken with shame and remorse, would weep and perhaps swoon. He had given orders for a field hospital to be in attendance when the officers were deprived of military rank and honours. But the barber and the doctor stood idle.

The "state criminals" merely expressed amused contempt at the ceremony to which they were subjected. There was such dignity in their calm bearing that those who were in charge of the proceedings kept their eyes averted with embarrassment, and the Generals turned their horses aside.

After being stripped of their uniforms the condemned men were clothed in striped prison robes.

The prison clothes were handed out hastily, and many of them did not fit the prisoners. With some they trailed along the ground, with others they barely covered the knees.

The crowd standing at the end of the wooden Troitsky Bridge kept growing. People waved their hands and caps.

"It is good to know that the people are with us," said Gorbachevsky. "Their heart tells them who their defenders are."

Lunin made a sign with his hand and the prisoners crowded round him from all sides.

"We shall now be marched past the snobbish rabble

like so many buffoons in these striped robes," he said. "They have been graciously allowed to witness our supposed humiliation and despair. Then let us go with the tread of the ancient heroes, making their stately progress to the Capitol to receive their laurels."

And when the guards led the prisoners back to their cells past the gaping knots of high-ranking personages, the latter held their lorgnettes to their eyes with eager curiosity. The "state criminals" with Lunin at their head walked past at a calm, stately gait, carrying on a friendly conversation among themselves.

These personages, no less than the Tsar, expected to see them looking melancholy and downcast, and were amazed at the spectacle of those men in prison clothes walking past with a proud independent air.

A member of the staff of a foreign embassy, who had contrived to obtain a place among these spectators, afterwards wrote home:

"What kind of men are they? Looking at them one would hardly believe that they had just been deprived of everything that is held most precious in this world—position, property, career, a happy life in the bosom of their family...."

* * *

The five, whom the crowd of prisoners had been vainly seeking on the square, were locked up for that last night in the Kronwerk Curtain.

This was a vaulted corridor with small wooden cells on either side resembling cages.

The prisoners were placed singly in these cages, allowed to write home and granted a last meeting with their relatives.

Rileyev, not wishing to subject his wife to another cruel ordeal and unnerve himself when he wished to face

his execution calmly, refused to avail himself of a meeting with her.

Sergei Muravyov was allowed a meeting with his sister Ekaterina Bibikova upon her insistence. She broke down so completely that she had to be carried back to her carriage.

The other three had no meetings with their relatives.

Here, in the casemate of the Kronwerk Curtain, a deathly stillness reigned. The cells were divided from each other only by a wooden partition which had large chinks in it. The warders allowed the doomed men a last indulgence—they could talk to one another almost freely.

Sergei Muravyov's cell was next to that of Bestuzhev-Ryumin. The knowledge delighted Muravyov: he would now be able to encourage his young friend, keep his spirits up and enable him to face death proudly.

Muravyov exhorted Bestuzhev to hold his head high when he stepped up onto the scaffold. Young though he was himself, he instructed his friend as a father and a teacher to live those last few minutes of his life with the thought of Russia's future alone in his mind, with the conviction in his heart that posterity's judgement would vindicate them.

And they had, all five of them, only a few more hours to live.

The warders, accompanied by the Commandant's assistant, came with new fetters. The condemned men had been ordered to be put into specially heavy irons, as if there was still a chance of their escaping on their way to the gallows.

Pestel raised the small padlock of the foot shackles to his eyes.

"Has this been ordered specially for us?" he asked.

Podushkin glanced at the lock in some confusion.

"They have mixed them up, it seems," he said, and shouted at the prison locksmith: "These are for the first

category, you fool, those who are going to Siberia. Fetch the others without any writing on them!"

"Pretty cheering, I must say, even for the first category," Pestel said ironically.

Short sayings were stamped on the padlocks—an innocent piece of fun on the part of the ironmongers to ensure a brisk sale of their wares. Some of these inscriptions were:

"Love me little, love me long."

"Forget me not."

When the fetters were brought into Rileyev's cell, he wound up his last letter to his wife with the words: "Farewell, I have been told to dress...."

Even the case-hardened Podushkin was overawed at the prisoners' self-possession and calmness, and treated them with unusual courtesy, asking each one whether he had any special requests.

"I have a request," Pestel said. "Tell me the truth—is Major Vladimir Raevsky here just now or not?"

Podushkin dismissed the warders with a sign and lingering behind in the cell for a moment said almost in a whisper:

"As soon as this thing started Raevsky was brought here from the Tiraspol Fortress. But he is not mixed up in your case and was not found to be involved in the Secret Society, so his sentence will be a lighter one. And now, move along."

"Thanks," Pestel said with quiet joy, and went out, holding up his fetters.

The chains jangled loudly on the stone floor of the corridor. Rileyev shouted out: "Good-bye, brothers!"

In response the prisoners began furiously to bang the doors of their cells.

Pestel walked along dragging his feet, but he felt light at heart. He was thinking of Vladimir Raevsky.

From what Podushkin had just told him he gathered

that Raevsky had not admitted being a member of the Secret Society and as in the year 1822 when imprisoned in the Tiraspol Fortress, he had the right to repeat the courageous lines of his verse:

*That I my cruel destiny
With adamantine patience bear,
In nought my vows do I forswear.*

The five men were led out of the Kronwerk Curtain.

A platoon of Pavlovsky Grenadiers surrounded them and escorted them to the fortress chapel. There, by the royal command, the priest in funeral vestments read the dead service over them.

Upon leaving the church they had white shrouds with black strings put on them, and black belts were drawn round their waists on which was written in large letters: "Felon. Regicide." After that, in accordance with the Tsar's inexhaustible fantasy, the five were conducted down the line of troops standing on the square, for the edification, apparently, of the officers and men. The gallows needing to be put in order after the slight rain, it was decided not to lead the condemned men back to their cells. They were taken past the gallows and temporarily accommodated in a roomy cellar. This "waiting room" with a tiny dirty window in the depth of the ramparts resembled a tomb.

"Do you mean to say we don't deserve at least some respect and a better death?" Pestel said quietly to Rilev. "Haven't we proved that we are not afraid of bullets or cannon balls? I got a sword 'for bravery' as well as a wound at the battle of Borodino."

Pestel sank wearily onto one of the long narrow boxes that lay piled up in the cellar. They were the doomed men's coffins. Sergei Muravyov hastily embraced Bestuzhev in order to screen those ghastly boxes from him.

All were silent. Bestuzhev alone wept bitterly. He was so young, so eager to live. . . .

Sergei Muravyov stroked his head, seemingly forgetful of his own fate. Kakhovsky gazed at them with anguish in his sunken eyes.

Suddenly Rileyev, seized with that blazing passion that had inspired his whole life and work, said in a voice deep with emotion:

"Friends, our past is done with. The present is beyond our power and so vile that we are free to reject it. So let our thoughts take us into the beautiful future. That it will be beautiful who can doubt after seeing the sympathy of the soldiers who have been driven here to witness our disgrace? Who can doubt it after seeing what we so little expected—the readiness of the common people to join forces with us when we stood in Senate Square?"

"And the crowds of peasants at Motovilovka! They wanted to join us, too," Muravyov-Apostol added bitterly, "but I did not trust them, I did not understand them."

"We did not understand, but those who come after us, the young ones, will." Rileyev uttered these words with profound conviction.

"And the cadets and the sailors, too, were ready to die with us in the square. When Mikhail Bestuzhev was hastening to join us with his battalion and was passing the square of soldiers facing the Neva, he suddenly saw some youths from the First Cadet Corps and the Naval School running towards him. 'We are delegated by our comrades,' they said. 'We want to ask you to let us join your ranks.' Bestuzhev hesitated for a minute: those fledglings side by side with the mustachioed Grenadiers. . . . But he resisted the temptation, he did not want to endanger the lives of those young heroes. He said to them at the time: 'Save yourselves for other exploits, Russia will be needing them badly.' And the children promised. . . . So there, my friends." Rileyev threw his head back

and his eyes shone as of old with the light of inspiration. "Let us go on this last journey with the thought of those younglings who will carry on our cause and win it. I see them, I greet them! The new shoots from the seeds of liberty which we have sown!"

"So be it!" said Pestel, and with a clang of his chains drew himself up to his full height.

And all the others repeated:

"So be it!"

The executioners came into the cellar. They put white caps on the doomed men, which covered their faces as well as their heads, bound their hands tightly and led them to the gallows.

The Tsar himself was out of town at the time. He had gone to Tsarskoye Selo, and every half hour a speeding courier came to him with fresh reports.

Among the crowd pressed back behind the ramparts a rumour was spread that Benkendorf was deliberately dragging things out, and that at the eleventh hour the condemned men would be pardoned. He was said to be staring all the time in the direction whence the Tsar's messenger could be expected.

But all the messengers were outward bound to Tsarskoye Selo. Thence no one hastened with glad tidings.

The nooses were slipped over the prisoners' heads.

The priest stepped down from the platform, and upon turning round, saw to his horror that only two men were hanging on the ropes. The other three had slipped from the nooses, and the thin boards of the platform giving way under their weight, they had fallen into the deep pit. Those men were Rileyev, Muravyov-Apostol and Kakhovsky.

Muravyov, in falling, had hurt himself. His face, from which the cap had slipped, was covered with blood.

"Poor Russia!" he cried bitterly. "They cannot even hang us properly."

Kakhovsky uttered a coarse oath. Rileyev shouted angrily to Chernishov:

"Give the executioner your aiguillettes, they are stronger than the ropes!"

The rest was drowned in the Governor-General's ferocious shout: "Hang them again!"

Chernishov rushed up to the executioners and rapped out a command. Benkendorf, unnerved by the spectacle, lay flat on his horse's neck with his face buried in its mane.

* * *

The five were buried on Golodai Island, beyond the Smolensk cemetery, where the guard-house stood. The soldiers there were told not to allow any visits to the graves of the executed men. But people came pouring down in crowds.

To put them on a false scent, they were told that the bodies had been thrown into the fortress moat. And there, too, by the moat, a sad murmuring crowd stood all day.

The next day the thunder of cannon announced some solemn occasion. A divine service of purification was held in Senate Square at the Tsar's bidding. The Metropolitan himself officiated in concert with the other prelates. Holy water was sprinkled on the spots where the rebel troops had stood in December, in order to cleanse the very stones of all traces of mutiny.

The Dean of the Kazansky Cathedral, however, donned a black chasuble and said a mass for the dead.

Ekaterina Bibikova, Sergei Muravyov's sister, went into the cathedral to offer a prayer for her brother and stopped in amazement: the priest, in black, with tears streaming down his face, was uttering those dear names—"Sergei, Pavel, Mikhail, Kondrati and Pyotr...."

* * *

Rileyev's prophecy concerning the new shoots that would spring from the seeds of liberty which the Decembrists had sown came true sooner than he could have conceived.

Young Alexander Herzen, almost a boy, snatched up and raised aloft the banner of liberty which the cruel hand of the Tsar had pulled down into the dust.

The ideas of the Decembrists, the execution and martyrdom of Russia's first political champions of freedom, and penal servitude for life to which their comrades were sentenced, awakened Herzen.

He described this awakening later, on the pages of the Russian journal *Polyarnaya Zvezda*, which he published in London. The journal carried on its covers a medallion with the profiles of the five executed revolutionists symbolizing complete solidarity with the great cause for which they had died.

Herzen attended church service in the Kremlin the day after the terrible news of the execution was made public.

"... Nicholas's victory over the five was celebrated by a thanksgiving service. Metropolitan Filaret in the Kremlin thanked God for the murder. The whole royal family joined the prayer, next to them the Senate, the ministers, and all round, occupying a vast space, dense masses of the Life-Guards stood kneeling, hatless. Cannon thundered from the Kremlin heights. Never had the gallows had such a solemnization.

"Nicholas realized the importance of victory.

"A boy of fourteen, lost amid the crowd, I was at that thanksgiving service; and there, before the altar defiled by the bloodthirsty prayer, I swore to avenge the executed men; I dedicated myself to the struggle with that throne, that altar, those cannons."

Herzen kept his oath.

* * *

Another of Rileyev's prophecies—his faith in the revolutionary valour of his friend, the great poet—came true.

A month before the rising of December 14th Rileyev wrote to Pushkin: "The eyes of Russia are turned upon you, be a poet and a citizen!"

And here, too, Pushkin rose nobly to the occasion. What a comfort, what a great encouragement it was to the Decembrists, when, sitting chained together in the cramped cells of the Chita convict prison, they listened to Pushkin's verses dedicated to them.

Ivan Pushchin, the poet's "dearest friend," received from Nikita Muravyov's wife, who had come out to join her husband, a sheet of paper covered with that dear, familiar handwriting. Surreptitiously, with hands trembling from joy, he received the precious paper through the barred window of his cell.

Pushchin read it out to his prison mates:

*Deep down in the Siberian mines
Your chains with proud patience wear.
The lofty yearning of your minds,
The woes you suffer—fruit shall bear.*

How Pushkin acquitted himself of the task imposed upon him by Rileyev's mandate is best illustrated in the admirable words of Herzen:

"A great sadness seized the hearts of all thinking people. Only Pushkin's sweeping and resonant melody sounded in the valleys of slavery and anguish. That melody, rising from a bygone epoch, flooded the present with its courageous sounds and sent its voice into the distant future."